Michael Butter

From Panem to the Pandemic: An Introduction to Cultural Studies

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Literatur- und Kulturwissenschaft

Zugänge – Reflexionen – Transfer

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1 Introduction

This book has grown in equal parts out of fascination and frustration. It is the result of fascination because "The Introduction to Cultural Studies," a central part of the English curriculum at German universities, is one of my favorite classes to teach. It is fun because of the sheer range of material one can cover in a single session: from Shakespeare to Shakira, from conspiracy theories to haute couture, and from shopping habits to the ways in which people use their smartphones on the subway. In fact, it was the possibility to go beyond literature, to study film and popular culture that lured me away from German and into English and American Studies when I was a student. Even more importantly, as I explain in more detail below, more than any other class I have ever taught, "The Introduction to Cultural Studies" has the potential to change students' lives and help them see the world differently.

However, this book is also the result of frustration. As I quickly learned when I first taught the class, there is no good comprehensive textbook that introduces beginning students to the relevant concepts and ideas. Don't get me wrong. There are quite a few very good introductions to different aspects of Cultural Studies, for example, to visual culture, material culture, or questions of gender, race, or class. (If you have no idea what some or any of these things are, don't worry. It's exactly the goal of this book to introduce you to them thoroughly and in a good order.) But books designed to introduce Bachelor students to Cultural Studies as a whole don't do that very well. They either assume that you already know things that most of you don't know when you enroll in an introductory class, or they are not systematic enough. Others leave out some important concepts but go into too much detail with regard to others. And most of them are written in a style that is way too complicated for beginning students. Moreover, most existing introductions are not very good when it comes to teaching you how to apply these concepts in your own analyses.

For me, however, this is the most important task of such an introduction. It is not enough to understand the concepts that are important in Cultural Studies. You also need to be able to work with them. It is not very likely that you will be called upon to explain how race and class are related in an abstract fashion in a seminar in a few semesters' time. It is far more likely that your task will be to analyze how they are related in a specific text, case study, or cultural practice. Knowing which concepts to apply to a "text" (I explain in chapter 1 why I put this word in quotation marks here) or practice and how to apply them, then, is what you need to learn in order to do well in your studies.

As you probably know already, learning – and especially learning how to do something – requires active engagement and exercising. Just listening to a lecture or reading a book won't do. When I teach "The Introduction to Cultural Studies" at my home

university, my lecture is accompanied by tutorials. The tutorials are led by advanced students and provide a space for beginning students to discuss what they have learned in the lecture and to practice its application. I also interrupt my lectures roughly every twenty minutes to allow students to ask questions or do small tasks. For example, I ask them to work with their neighbor or in small groups and apply a concept I have just introduced to an image, a short text, or a movie clip.

Obviously, it is impossible to include such interactive elements in a book. But there are questions for self-study for you at the end of each chapter, and I hope you will make use of them. Sometimes these are very open questions or questions that ask you to draw on your personal experience. In these cases, it's obviously impossible for me to provide a model answer. But other questions are more specific, asking you, for example, to interpret a song or think about a specific phenomenon. In these cases, I have model answer ready. For each of these questions, I have recorded a short video that you find on the publisher's YouTube channel (@narrfranckeattemptoverlag228). In fact, there is a playlist for this book. In an ideal world, you would read a chapter, take a shot at answering the questions and only then check out the answers. I am not sure, though, that we are living in an ideal world.

While the interactivity this book can provide is limited by factors beyond my control, I have intentionally set limits to what I am covering in it. If you are already an advanced student who is using this book to refresh your memory of certain things or to revise for an exam, you will most likely shake your head repeatedly because you feel that I have left out too many important concepts or that I have simplified others too much. This will be even more true if you are an instructor who is considering this book for a class of yours. Believe me – I am very much aware of the many important concepts, theories, and terms that I have omitted. And sometimes the decision what would make the cut and what wouldn't was pretty hard. But this book is an *introduction* to Cultural Studies, and I wanted to take the idea of the introduction seriously. Not everything can and should be taught in an introduction. What this book teaches you is the tip of the iceberg, and many things will remain hidden under the surface of the water. If this sounds a bit ominous, let's use another image. Think of this introduction as the foundation on which you will build in the future, in particular in the classes you will take in the next semesters. (And maybe, if you are an instructor, this book will help you to cover more than before because you can build on it in your lecture or seminar.)

Accordingly, the theories, concepts, and terms that I introduce in this book are the ones that I consider absolutely essential for Cultural Studies. Obviously, opinions can differ with regard to what is essential and what isn't. This is why the subtitle of this book is "An Introduction to Cultural Studies." I have chosen the indefinite article intentionally because this book is merely one possible way to introduce you to the topic. In order to do so, I draw on many different examples – mostly, but not exclusively from American culture –, but there are two examples to which I return again and again: *The Hunger Games* novels (2008-10) and the films (2012-15) based on them, and

the Coronavirus pandemic. This is why the title of the book is "From Panem to the Pandemic." Panem is the fictional country where the story of *The Hunger Games* series is set. *The Hunger Games* have been my prime example ever since I first taught this class more than a decade ago. Many students already know the novels or at least the films before they enroll in my class, and those who don't usually enjoy reading and watching them. The novels and the films are also quite complex and contradictory and thus can be meaningfully analyzed with many different concepts and theories. (Throughout this book, I will assume that you know the first film. If you don't know it yet, please watch it.) The last two times I taught the class I used the coronavirus pandemic as my other major example. Not only because it affected all our lives so much or because it delayed the writing of this book considerably, but mostly because it allows me to demonstrate how the insights of Cultural Studies enable us to make sense not only of fictional stories but of real-life events.

Modelled on a one-semester lecture course, this book contains twelve chapters, including the introduction and the conclusion. Chapters 2 to 8 discuss the different elements of the "circuit of culture," an excellent model to understand culture that Paul du Gay and his co-authors introduced in their book *Doing Cultural Studies: The Story of the Sony Walkman.* (This is the book I have been using mostly in my classes, but, as it was published in 1997, it is by now outdated. It also does not explain all concepts equally well and doesn't do an ideal job when it comes to teaching students how to apply the concepts.) These chapters introduce the basic concepts of Cultural Studies – representation, identity, production, consumption, and regulation –, which du Gay and his colleagues think of as forming a circuit to capture how the elements all influence each other (more on models in general below). Chapters 9 to 11 put spotlights on specific aspects of culture, for example, space or memory but also visual or popular culture. They discuss how the concepts introduced in the first part help us make sense of these specific aspects and introduce additional concepts that have been specifically developed for understanding them. Chapter 12 concludes our journey with a short reflection on the politics of Cultural Studies.

In this introductory chapter I address a few central questions to get us started. I begin with the key question: What is culture? Cultural Studies is, obviously, all about culture, and therefore we need to be quite clear what we are talking about. The following section then asks that question that follows logically: What is Cultural Studies? I provide a definition and discuss why Cultural Studies should in theory be interested in all aspects of culture alike but, in reality, isn't. Afterwards I ask: How can we do Cultural Studies? I explain why we need theories, concepts, and models to do Cultural Studies and introduce the model of "the circuit of culture." In closing I address what I call the promises and pitfalls of Cultural Studies – why learning its basic concepts can be particularly rewarding for you but also quite challenging.

What is culture?

There is a very short and straightforward answer to this question: Culture is everything that humans do and produce. This broad definition can be derived from the original meaning of the English word "culture." According to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, which is the best source for researching how the meanings of words have changed over time, "culture" originally meant "[t]he action or practice of cultivating the soil." In the 15th century, therefore, when the word was first used, "culture" meant what the word "agriculture" means today. Culture, then, are the changes that humans impose on the natural world. In other words, culture is everything that nature is not; it is the opposite of nature.

broad definition of culture

Nature and culture thus form what Cultural Studies scholars call a binary opposition. Binary oppositions are an important way of organizing our experiences and structuring the world, and you will encounter many of them in this book. However, binary oppositions can also be a bit misleading. When we use them, we suggest that two entities (nature and culture, but also, for example, public and private, or masculine and feminine) are really entirely different from each other and that our language simply reflects this divide. In reality, however, by using different terms like "nature and culture," "private and public," or "masculine and feminine" we create this divide. We put things that cannot always be that easily separated into neat little boxes. In other words, we construct the distinctions, and our language only makes it appear as if they existed all along.

binary opposition

If you think about it for a moment, it is rather obvious that nature and culture cannot be that easily separated from each other. After all, human beings are part of nature as well. We breathe air, eat, sleep, urinate, defecate, and procreate – like all other animals. Everything that we do and produce is therefore, from a certain perspective, part of nature as well. And in fact, as Bruno Latour, a historian of science, has shown (1993), the binary opposition of nature and culture, the clear divide between the two, is a relatively new invention and only a few centuries old. It is one of the most important characteristics of what historians and sociologists call modernity. According to Latour, before the beginning of the modern age around 1500, humans did not think of themselves as separated from nature. And we could add that this distinction only emerged in what we call the western world.

nature and culture

Maybe, then, if the opposition to nature is not as watertight as it may appear at first, it is not a good idea after all to define "culture" in such a broad way. And maybe you felt uncomfortable with this broad definition anyway. Because if everything that humans do and produce is culture, then everything is – on some level at least – equally valuable. And this might feel wrong to you. Surely, you might say, there must be distinctions between the very different things that humans do and produce, and maybe we should reserve the term "culture" for those things that possess a certain quality. This narrow definition of culture is younger than the broad one we have used so far. The *Oxford English Dictionary* tells us that it first appeared in the late 17th century and describes it as

narrow definition of culture

follows: "Refinement of mind, taste, and manners; artistic and intellectual development. Hence: the arts and other manifestations of human intellectual achievement regarded collectively." The narrow definition of culture is one that you are probably familiar with from school or from the arts (or culture) section of newspapers or magazines. According to this definition, only human products and actions that meet a certain standard are part of culture.

In its most extreme form, this narrow definition was propagated by the poet Matthew Arnold. Arnold lived in 19th-century England and belonged to what literary historians call the Victorian Age. Besides poetry, he also wrote many works of literary and cultural criticism. In the preface to his most important work *Culture and Anarchy* (1869), he famously defined culture as "the best which has been thought and said in the world" (5). For Arnold, then, not even every poem or work of philosophy deserves the label "culture." Only the best poems and works of philosophy do. He would have strongly objected to the idea that everything that humans do – including playing rugby in the mud or the fiddle in a pub – is culture if this idea had ever occurred to him, which I doubt.

Matthew Arnold's position is extreme, and you would be hard pressed to find somebody supporting it today. But in milder versions it is still around, and until recently it was even fairly widespread. There are still people who think that only those human ideas and products that meet a certain quality standard are worth engaging with and studying. However, unlike Arnold these people usually do not deny that ideas and products that do not meet the standard are culture. In order to distinguish them from what they think is worthy of their attention, they either distinguish between "Culture" with a capital C, that is, the ideas and products that meet the standard, and "culture" with a small c, that is, the ideas and products that don't. Or they use qualifiers to indicate what is worthy of consideration and what isn't. The ideas and products deemed worthy are then referred to as high culture. Those that are deemed unworthy are correspondingly labeled mass culture, or popular culture.

I will have much more to say about such attempts to map the cultural field in chapter 11 where I discuss different definitions of popular culture. What is important right now is that it is not that simple to distinguish between high and popular culture, between that which some people deem worthy studying and that which they think should better be ignored. Take Shakespeare, for example. For a long time, his plays and poems have been the epitome of high culture. Quoting lines from his works – think of Hamlet's famous "To be or not to be" soliloquy – has for a long time been a way to show off how cultured one is. But initially his plays and poems were part of the everyday culture of his time, and performances of his plays were attended by people from all classes and ways of life. In the Globe Theatre in London, where many of Shakespeare's plays were first performed, you did not even have to pay for a seat but could buy a cheaper ticket to stand next to the stage. It was only in later centuries that his works were put on the pedestal on which many people still see them today. Similarly, TV shows were for a

Matthew Arnold

high culture

the cultural field

long time seen as a cheap form of popular entertainment. In recent years, however, they have been much celebrated for their complexity and increasingly considered high culture worthy of being reviewed in serious magazines and newspapers.

distinction between high culture and popular culture

Even more than the distinction between nature and culture, then, the distinction between high culture and popular culture or mass culture is problematic. As we will see in much more detail in chapter 12, there is nothing in a Shakespeare play itself that makes it better than a song by Shakira, just as opera is in itself not more valuable than country music. The criteria that people use to determine what they value highly and what they don't are arbitrary, and they change over time. Moreover, what people value highly and what they deride is closely tied to the social class they belong to. As the French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu, whose work I also discuss in detail in another chapter, has shown, taste is a very problematic category. Claiming that the cultural products one likes are superior to others usually serves the function of elevating the group one belongs to over others.

Culture is everything we do and produce

Attempts to distinguish between "good" and "bad" culture, then, are problematic, and scholars of Cultural Studies should not use such distinctions to determine the object of their studies. (Instead, like Bourdieu, they should and indeed often do investigate why people make such distinctions in the first place and what we can learn from that about their identities.) The only useful and reasonable answer to the question "What is culture?" therefore is indeed the one I already gave above: Culture is everything that humans do and produce; it's the opposite of nature. (Let's not be deterred by the fact that the binary opposition of nature and culture does not quite hold. Such binary oppositions never do, but they are nevertheless necessary and helpful.) In the memorable phrase of Raymond Williams, one of the founding fathers of Cultural Studies, "culture is a whole way of life" (93). Accordingly, Cultural Studies is interested in everything that humans do and produce. What a specific analysis focuses on is not determined by the alleged value of the practice or artifact that is studied but by the question a researcher is interested in at that moment.

culture is about shared meanings

In the previous paragraph I did something that a good scholar shouldn't do. I cut off the quote by Raymond Williams mid-sentence. When he writes that culture means "a whole way of life," he adds, in order to explain this, "the common meanings" (93). What he means by "common" is, as we just established, that culture is ordinary, that it exists not only in the seemingly detached realm of the arts but that it is everywhere and everything. What he means by "meanings" is that everything that humans do and produce means something. It indicates who we are, what we think, what we believe, and what we value. Here it is important to remember that "common" means not only "ordinary," but also "shared." If we understand Williams's phrase in this way, culture is not only about the meanings of ordinary things but also about shared meanings. And, in fact, this is exactly how Stuart Hall, another important figure in Cultural Studies, defines culture in his book *Representation* (1997, 2013), on which I will draw heavily in the next chapter. In the introduction to the book Hall writes: "To put it simply,

culture is about 'shared meanings'" (1). What he means by that is that being part of a culture means to understand the meanings of what people do and produce.

Since meanings are predominantly shared by way of language, to be part of a culture means to speak a specific language. You belong to a culture or understand it really well if you know its language, codes, and rituals. This is particularly obvious with what we sometimes refer to as foreign cultures, which often appear quite alien to us, but it is also true much closer to home. I lived in England for a year as an undergraduate, and although I already spoke English fairly well at the time and felt that I understood English culture, I never really mastered the rules of cricket. But many people in India, Pakistan, and other parts of the world do. They speak the language of cricket and can thus be said to belong – together with many but by no means all of the people in Britain – to an international culture of cricket. Or think about youth culture and the specific language that teenagers use to set themselves apart from children and adults alike. Depending on how old you are, you might still be part of it, but in a few years, you won't understand it anymore unless you make a conscious effort, as the language of this culture is constantly changing to maintain the distinctions towards those considered too young and too old.

language

But if you are newly enrolled at a university, you are right now being introduced to a new culture: academic culture. If these are your first weeks at university, you are in the middle of learning its codes and conventions. If you are studying at a German university, you have probably already figured out that a class announced for 2pm only starts at 2.15pm, and that you are not supposed to clap at the end of a lecture but to knock on the desk with your knuckles. But you may not have been to an office hour yet and once you go to one for the first time, you might feel a bit lost because you might not be sure about the dos and don'ts. You have begun to learn the language of this particular culture, but you haven't really mastered it yet.

academic culture

The previous paragraphs show that we can and indeed have to distinguish between different cultures after all. However, not in the evaluative and hierarchical way in which people have tried – in vain – to separate high culture from low culture or elite culture from popular culture. But in an entirely descriptive and non-evaluative way. There are many cultures, because people do many things very differently and many things mean different things to different people, depending on where they live, how old they are, how much money they have, which ethnicity and gender they belong to, and a whole lot of other factors. Cultures can be specific to certain regions, countries, groups, or religions. We can speak, for example, of German culture, western culture, Asian culture, working-class culture, Islamic culture, fan culture, football culture, and so on. At the end of the day, it only makes sense to speak of cultures in the plural. There are always many cultures.

cultures in the plural

What is Cultural Studies?

the study of shared meanings

The task for scholars of Cultural Studies, then, is clear. In order to understand a specific culture or a part of it, we need to understand what things mean in this culture, and how and why they come to mean what they mean. The best way to do this is to study how these meanings are shared (and, in fact, as we will see in the next chapter, produced). This is why Cultural Studies is so interested in representations: in texts and images of all kinds. And as my comments about youth culture and other cultures stress (and as you knew already anyway), culture and identity are closely connected. Studying the meanings of what people do and produce also helps us understand who they are, and this is another big interest of Cultural Studies. We can therefore define Cultural Studies as the scholarly exploration of the shared meanings of a specific culture or a part of that culture.

everything can be the subject

Since everything humans do, from writing modernist poetry to defecating, is part of culture, truly everything can be the subject of a Cultural Studies analysis. In theory, nothing is beyond or beneath it. In reality, however, Cultural Studies is not equally concerned with every aspect of culture. It does not favor high culture over popular culture, but it has its own biases and exclusions. It is, for example, more interested in TV shows than in Dan Brown novels. To understand why scholars in this field prefer some topics over others, we have to understand how Cultural Studies became part of university curricula and what kind of scholars usually do Cultural Studies.

Landes-kunde

At the University of Tübingen where I teach, students in the B.A. programs offered by the English Department take classes in four different areas: Academic English, that is language classes; Literary Studies; Linguistics; and Cultural Studies. Other departments in Germany might use slightly different labels, but their curriculum is usually very similar. However, it wasn't always like this. When I studied English in the late 1990s, we did not have classes in Cultural Studies. Instead, we had what was called Landeskunde, which could be translated as "country studies." Landeskunde was meant to provide future teachers of English with the necessary knowledge about Great Britain, the U.S., and increasingly also the rest of the English-speaking world. Students were expected to learn about the political systems of these countries (Who elects the British prime minister and who the American president?), as well as about culture (What is cricket, what is American Football?), history (What happened in 1066, what was the Boston Tea Party?), and media (What is the BBC, how is it financed, and how does it differ from PBS in the United States?).

Landes-kunde replaced by Cultural Studies

Landeskunde, at least as I experienced it, was focused on facts and not on the interpretation of phenomena and practices. It was usually taught by language instructors. But ten years later, Landeskunde had almost completely disappeared from English degree programs and been replaced by Cultural Studies. To cut a long story short, there are two interrelated reasons for this major overhaul of the curriculum. First of all, there was the insight that the phenomena traditionally covered by Landeskunde could and

better should be studied with less focus on the facts and more on interpretation, on their meanings and what one could learn from them about British, American, and other English-speaking cultures. Another factor was the growing awareness that not only novels, plays, and poems could be interpreted but films, photographs, and TV shows as well, and that the same was true for everyday and other practices. And Cultural Studies became the place to do this. This is why by now almost every B.A. program in English at German universities features an introduction to Cultural Studies in one form or another, and usually additional classes that build on it. And this is also why it is best to consider Cultural Studies a field – and not a discipline like English or Sociology.

In Germany, as we just established, Cultural Studies is predominantly a field of study within English Departments. By contrast, in the United Kingdom, where Cultural Studies emerged earlier as a distinct field, specific departments were dedicated to it. The most famous of these was the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies at the University of Birmingham, which was founded in 1964 already. In both countries, however, Cultural Studies exists in close vicinity to Literary Studies. In Germany, they are part of the same department, and many instructors teach both Literary and Cultural Studies. In the United Kingdom, they are – or used to be, as many Cultural Studies departments and centers have been closed in recent years – situated in the neighboring departments, and many instructors were affiliated with both.

Literary Studies

In theory, of course, Literary Studies could and maybe even should be a part of Cultural Studies. After all, literature is a part of culture. But the design of academic departments and curricula is never an entirely logical matter. It is always also about protecting existing jobs, and since Literary Studies was there first, Cultural Studies swallowing it up completely was out of the question (although some scholars of literature worried that it might happen). Thus, Literary Studies and Cultural Studies have co-existed on often friendly, but sometimes on less friendly terms for the past decades, with each claiming a specific territory of their own. Put simply, Literary Studies, as its name implies, is concerned with literature in the narrow sense, with novels, short stories, poems, and plays. Cultural Studies does the rest. It is concerned with different media such as television, film, or photography, with non-fictional texts, and the practices of everyday life.

literature as part of culture

If you are already a more advanced student, you are maybe shaking your head right now because you may have never experienced the separation between Literary and Cultural Studies as that strict. And you are of course right. Many of your instructors do research in both fields and would be hard-pressed if they had to decide for one. At German universities, the separation is often to a large degree a bureaucratic one. Classes that deal only with literature serve the modules in Literary Studies; classes that deal with film, photography, or social movements serve the modules in Cultural Studies; and classes that deal with literature and other media serve the modules in both fields. Usually, if a student wants to get credit for a Literary Studies module, their term paper

Literary and Cultural Studies

needs to focus on literature; if they want credit for a Cultural Studies module, their term paper needs to focus on a different medium.

Importantly, as porous and artificial as the border between Literary Studies and Cultural Studies might be, it nevertheless exists. And its existence explains why Cultural Studies scholars hardly ever work on literature. They simply leave it to their colleagues in Literary Studies. This is fine as long as it is canonical literature, on which Literary Studies still focuses despite several waves of canon revisions in the last decades. But it constitutes a problem when it comes to popular fiction: thrillers like the ones by Dan Brown, or romances like the *Twilight Saga* (2005-20). They have of course received some scholarly attention but not nearly as much as their popularity and thus impact would warrant. And popular fiction that is less successful often still flies completely under the radar of academia. Literary Studies scholars ignore it because it is not part of the canon. Cultural Studies scholars ignore it because it is literature, and what often drew them to Cultural Studies – I am no exception in that regard – was the promise to work on media other than literature.

But popular fiction is by no means the only topic that Cultural Studies tends to neglect. There is also quite a strong presentist bias in the field, meaning that most of the work done deals with contemporary culture. The center at the University of Birmingham where British Cultural Studies originated, was not accidentally called Centre for *Contemporary* Cultural Studies, and until today older phenomena are often left to the closely related field of Cultural History. Once again, the main reason for this exclusion seems to be that most Cultural Studies scholars enjoy contemporary culture more than older variants. To be sure, scholars in all fields and disciplines have the tendency to focus on what they enjoy or even love, but this tendency appears to be particularly pronounced in Cultural Studies. My colleague Russell West-Pavlov once described Cultural Studies scholars in a lecture as middle-class, leftist, snobbish, and driven by a desire to be young. This is certainly a caricature, but it explains why Cultural Studies has focused heavily on rock and pop music and youth culture and rather neglected topics such as gardening, religion, and – in the past – even sports, even though they are central parts of many peoples' identities.

In recent years this has changed to a certain degree, and some scholars have written on topics that they see critically. This is a positive development because it expands the range of cultural phenomena that get analyzed. And Cultural Studies should be all about understanding people and phenomena, however strange and even repulsive they may appear to us at first sight. Of course, it is impossible to leave our emotions completely out of the picture. How we feel about a topic will always have an impact on how we analyze and thus understand it. And so will our own positionality. I am a cis, heterosexual, able-bodied, White, upper-middle class man, and this does of course influence my understanding of things. But even if complete neutrality is neither possible nor desirable, we should nevertheless strive to be as balanced and nuanced as possible in the scholarly work we do. What we work on should be determined by the relevance of

popular fiction

a strong presentist bias

our own positionality

the phenomenon, not by our opinion of it; and our feelings should not be a shortcut to our eventual evaluation. This is what the best work in Cultural Studies does; this is what I have tried to do in this book; this is what I would like you to learn.

How do we do Cultural Studies?

Learning to do Cultural Studies is like learning a new language. You may be familiar with some of its vocabulary already, as terms like narrative, identity, or gender are also part of everyday language by now, but I assume that you are not yet familiar with the scholarly meaning of these and other terms and thus also not with the concepts they designate. As I said before, what I have always found problematic about other introductions is that they throw you into the cold water. From page one onward, they tend to assume a familiarity with certain concepts that beginning students usually don't have and that makes it hard, if not impossible for them to follow the argument that is being made. I will not do this in this book. I will assume that you only know about Cultural Studies what I have said so far, and I will assume that you are not familiar with any of the concepts that I discuss. Therefore, I will properly define every concept when I introduce it. These introductions happen in the chapters that follow. What I want to do here is to lay the foundation for the introduction of these concepts. And these foundations are the same as in any other field in the humanities.

concepts

Unlike the natural sciences, scholars in the humanities, including Cultural Studies scholars, do not weigh, count, or measure things. They interpret phenomena of all kinds, seeking to understand them. And as you no doubt remember from school, an interpretation is much more than a set of numbers or any other kind of data. It is more complex, and also less exact. It is therefore more difficult for others to check if a specific interpretation is sound, if it is, in other words, a good interpretation. They can't run the same test again and see if the resulting numbers match. (In reality, the natural sciences are also less exact and objective than some of their proponents still think. After all, the data that tests and experiments generate also need to be interpreted. They do not speak for themselves. But that's a different story that does not need to concern us here.) The most important criterion to determine the quality of an interpretation in the humanities is therefore intersubjective understandability (Schneider 7). Intersubjective understandability means that others need to be able to trace the different steps that we have taken in an interpretation to evaluate if these steps make sense and are free of contradictions. They also need to know which assumptions – for example, about how films affect their audiences, or how memory works – have guided our interpretations. This is why we need theories, methods, and models.

intersubjective under-standability

Theories create clarity and facilitate meaningful exchange. They have a specific topic or area that they cover – for example, what representation is and does, the topic of the next chapter. They provide clear definitions of a number of concepts – in this case, for example, mental representation, linguistic representation, or code. They spell out how these different concepts are related to each other in a systematic and unambiguous

theories

manner – stating, for example, that the code ties a mental representation to a linguistic one. They provide us with a coherent language to talk about and understand different phenomena, for example, representation. Theories thus not only enable us to approach and understand different phenomena in a scholarly fashion; they also allow us to make our assumptions explicit and to share them with others, permitting them to understand how we approached the phenomenon.

no analysis without a theory

I cannot stress enough that there is no interpretation or analysis that is not informed by a theory. There may still be some scholars who claim that they do not need theories, that theories are restricting, and that they approach the phenomena they are interested in neutrally without any assumptions. But that is impossible. As literary theorist Terry Eagleton famously put it many years ago, "Hostility to theory usually means an op-position to other people's theories and an oblivion of one's own" (xiv). Being aware that one is drawing on a specific theory to understand a phenomenon and being explicit about this, is a strength, not a weakness. It is an important step to achieve the inter-subjective understandability we are striving for.

competing theories

There are of course theories that differ from each other because they address different phenomena, for example, popular culture and material culture. But there are also the-ories that are interested in the same phenomenon but make very different assumptions and therefore arrive at very different conclusions. In chapter 8, for example, I will discuss two theories of consumption. One claims that consumers are passive, that they simply accept the goods and meanings offered to them. The other claims that consu-mers are active, that they change the goods and meanings offered to them. Such disa-greement is a strength, not a weakness. It is good that there are competing theories about the same phenomena, even though I will explain in that chapter why I think one of the theories is better than the other. But because there are competing theories, it's even more important to be explicit about which theory one is drawing on in a particular analysis. And the existence of competing theories also shows that theories are both enabling and restricting at the same time. They make us see certain things, but also make us miss others. They are like glasses that bring certain things into focus but keep others out of it.

Cultural Stu-dies as a specific field of study

As I already said in the previous section, Cultural Studies is not like English, Sociology, or Anthropology. It's not a real discipline and usually not located in departments of its own. It makes more sense to think of it as a specific field of study that is practiced within other departments or interdepartmental centers where scholars that share an interest in cultural phenomena come together. Or, as in the case of degree programs in English at German universities, it is even only a part of the curriculum. One conse-quence of this is that there are hardly any theories that are specific to Cultural Studies, as there are theories that we can label sociological or philosophical. Instead, Cultural Studies borrows from a large number of disciplines, for example, Anthropology, Film Studies, Linguistics, Literary Studies, Media Studies, Sociology, and many more. The theories that Cultural Studies scholars use function like a lingua franca. They allow

scholars originally from different disciplines to talk to each other, and to scholars from those disciplines from which the theories have been poached.

But theories are and need to be abstract. In order to apply them to cultural phenomena, we need more. We need methods. Methods translate theories into specific approaches that we can take to study the phenomena we are interested in. It will come as no surprise at this point that Cultural Studies is, as with the theories it draws on, quite syncretistic when it comes to methods, and that it mostly draws on methods from the disciplines that it also borrows its theories from. Cultural Studies scholars that are interested in everyday practices, for example, often use the anthropological method of participant observation to immerse themselves into and thus to understand the culture they are studying. If they are interested in how ordinary people make sense of certain phenomena, they might use a sociological method and conduct interviews with them. If they are interested in how a specific issue is represented throughout a broad number of news reports they might employ a method that is called discourse analysis and that has its roots in Linguistics, Political Science, and – in a version I discuss in chapter 3 – in History. If they want to find out how a specific film, song, or photograph works, they could do a close reading and thus use a method originally from Literary Studies. Since my origins are in Literary Studies and since my major examples in this book are *The Hunger Games* and the pandemic, I will draw on this method more frequently than on others.

<div style="float:right">methods</div>

However, the model that structures this book is a genuinely Cultural Studies one. Models are visual representations of specific theories or methods. They focus on specific aspects of a theory or method and highlight them, while leaving out others. The model that I find most helpful for learning what Cultural Studies is was developed by Paul du Gay and his colleagues in their study of the Walkman, which I already mentioned earlier. It's called "the circuit of culture," and this is what it looks like:

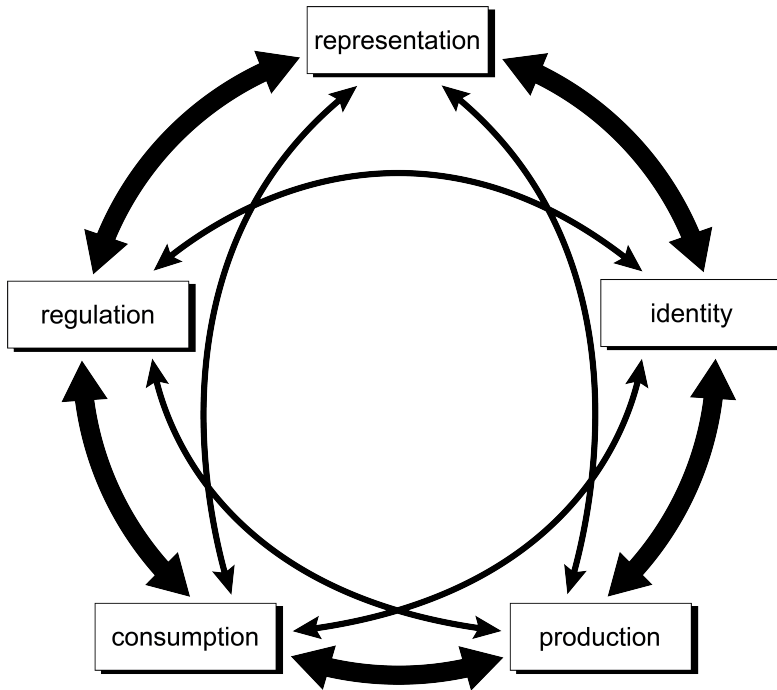<div style="float:right">Models</div>

Fig. 1: The Circuit of Culture

the circuit of culture

The model of the circuit of culture highlights that cultural phenomena are complex. In order to understand them, we need to consider different elements – labelled representation, identity, production, consumption, and regulation – and the ways in which they influence each other. (Never mind what these concepts mean exactly, we will get to this in due course. For the moment, your everyday understanding of them suffices completely.) The model understands cultural processes as embedded into the logic of capitalism since production and consumption are concepts from economy (although they mean more than that in the model and I will use them accordingly). But the model also rejects any straightforward economic reductionism, that is, it does not say that the economy determines everything else, while nevertheless acknowledging its importance. In other words, production has an influence on representation, but does not determine it. It is just one of several factors that need to be considered. As the multiple arrows make clear, the model understands culture as a complex, multi-faceted process, as dynamic and not at all static. It also holds that we can only properly understand specific representations – a TV show or a YouTube video – if we situate them in multiple contexts. Only studying the representations in isolation won't do.

the model visualizes assumptions

Interestingly, the model also visualizes certain assumptions that its designers may not have been aware of but that are apparent in how they analyze the Walkman in their book. The model's explicit claim is that all five elements of the circuit of culture are

equally important. But it is no coincidence that "representation" is located at the top, as it is the element that the book pays most attention to. By the same token, it is not surprising that "identity" is situated directly next to representation if we move clock-wise along the circuit as members of western cultures will almost automatically do because identity is the second major interest of the book. Production, consumption, and regulation are not discussed that extensively, and are connected very quickly to questions of representation (for example, how the invention of the Walkman was later represented by the company) and identity formation. This makes the book a rather typical Cultural Studies analysis, as studying representation and identity is absolutely central to the field. This is why I also dedicate more chapters to these topics than to the other three. I have, however tried, to pay more attention to production, consumption, and regulation than the creators of the model of the circuit of culture did.

The Promises and Pitfalls of Cultural Studies

At my home university B.A. students have to take three different introductions: to Literary Studies, to Linguistics, and to Cultural Studies. I think – and exam results confirm this impression – that the Introduction to Cultural Studies is the most chal- lenging one. Students usually already have an idea what Literary Studies is when they begin their studies because they have interpreted novels, poems, and plays in school already. They have to adapt to the way it is done at university, but they are not dealing with something entirely new. Linguistics, by contrast, is entirely new for most of them. They are unlikely to have ever heard of morphemes or generative grammar. But Lin- guistics is rather self-enclosed; it is so specific and technical that one usually does well once the initial strangeness has been overcome. Cultural Studies is a different matter, because it is familiar and new at the same time, and it has the potential to affect your life in ways that Literary Studies and Linguistics do not have.

<div style="float:right">Cultural Stu- dies is chal- lenging</div>

I said earlier that you are most likely already familiar with some of the terms that are important in Cultural Studies. That's because narrative, identity, or gender are terms used in everyday language these days, as they are important for our lives. And Cultural Studies is about who we are and how we live our lives. You may or may not care about literature or linguistics, but – since it is so encompassing – it is impossible that you do not care about the things that Cultural Studies is concerned with. And that's a challenge but also a chance.

<div style="float:right">familiar terms</div>

It's a challenge because it is very likely that you hold strong opinions about some of the things that Cultural Studies deals with (and that I therefore deal with in this book). And you might find some of the claims that Cultural Studies makes counterintuitive, and they might trigger resistance. It might even be that you will have to confront some prejudices that you hold (we all have them). At the very least, you will, as I also already said, need to learn a language – one that is particularly challenging because, unlike the very special language you learn in Linguistics, it partly overlaps with the language that you use outside of the classroom. And let's be frank: Some of the concepts and theories

<div style="float:right">counterintu- itive claims</div>

I discuss are complicated and pretty difficult to grasp at first. In fact, one is never entirely through with them. I may have written this book, but I would never claim that I entirely master everything I discuss myself. I am still learning, too.

Cultural Studies is rewarding

But learning how to do Cultural Studies can also be extremely rewarding. As students from my class confirm each time I teach it, it has the potential to make you see the world differently. It may very well help you to better understand yourself and the world around you. So, let's go and see what it's all about.

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2 Representation and Semiotics

As we saw in the last chapter, "representation" sits at the top of the circuit of culture. It is the most important concept in that model. But what is representation? If you are a German student of English – my target audience, but hopefully not the only one – it is possible that you are unfamiliar with the word, even in its everyday use, as its German equivalent, Repräsentation, occurs much more rarely in ordinary speech than the English term. But as a good citizen, you are familiar with the concept of representative democracy. Germany is a representative democracy, and so are the United Kingdom, the United States, and all other democracies in the world. Their citizens do not vote on laws and bills themselves (although some countries hold referenda regularly where all citizens can vote on certain issues), but every few years they elect representatives who will do the voting for them in the regional and national parliaments. These representatives stand for the citizens of their voting district. In other words, they represent them and (are supposed to) look after their interests. This is the idea of political representation.

political representation

By contrast, the kind of representation that I explore in this chapter is concerned with signs, with words, and images standing for concepts and ideas. In the first section, I explain what representation is, and how spoken and written language and images take on their meaning. This is the logical first step that we need to take, because, as we established in the last chapter, Cultural Studies is the scholarly exploration of the shared meanings of a culture. We therefore need to understand how these meanings come into existence and how they are shared. As we will see, representation is the answer to both of these questions.

signs

Throughout the first section (and beyond), I draw heavily on Stuart Hall, the scholar whose definition of culture as shared meanings I have adopted for this book. Hall has written an important book chapter in which he develops a theory of representation and explains it very well. Hall's central claim, which I also highlight, is that meaning is not determined by the things in the world and merely reflected by representations. Meaning is also not determined by the intentions of the people who use representations when they speak, write, draw, take pictures, and so on. Instead, meaning is constructed by the systems of representation, i.e., words, images, and the like, and their relationships to each other. This has important implications for the relationship between language and our understanding of the world. I discuss them in the second part of the chapter.

meaning is constructed

Importantly, that meaning is constructed does not mean that meaning is not really real. As we will see, it has very real effects. But, to come back to the binary opposition of nature and culture I talked about in the introduction, it means that meaning is not a natural, but a cultural phenomenon. And as we will see in later chapters, this goes just

constructions have real effects

as much for other phenomena that we might take for granted such as gender, sexuality, or race. In fact, the insight that meaning on all levels – from single words, as discussed in this chapter, to the memory of whole nations, as discussed in chapter 10 – is constructed, is at the heart of Cultural Studies.

semiotics

In the third part, I then broaden the focus and discuss what is called semiotics. As I will show, fashion, food, and many other things function – to a certain degree at least – like language because what we wear and eat also functions as signs. In a broader, more metaphorical sense, we can therefore speak of the language of fashion or the language of food, as some of the same rules apply to these phenomena. This is of course where things get really interesting for Cultural Studies scholars because it cuts right to the issues that the field is interested in.

Signs

Imagine you are in a classroom with me, and I project the image of a pig to the front wall. How do you know that it's a pig? And why it is that the word "pig" will at once come to your mind as well? And while you may not be very good at drawing a pig, you can say the word out loud immediately when I ask you what kind of animal we are looking at. You thus can communicate about it. In fact, you don't even have to see an image of a pig, let alone a real pig, in order to think and talk about what pigs are and do.

mental representations

What this little exercise shows is that there are actually "two systems of representation" involved at the same time when we speak about things. First of all, there are what Hall calls "*mental representations*" (3; his italics). These mental representations are, as the term implies, in our heads. They are the concepts that correspond to the objects, events, people, and animals in the real word, the referents as they are called in linguistics. Without these mental representations or concepts, we couldn't think about the world or anything in it, and we couldn't navigate our way through it. But since the concepts are in our minds, nobody has ever seen them. We have no idea what they look like. In pictures, they are often – note the term! – represented by little pictures of pigs, cakes, or whatever fills the brain. But it is very unlikely that there are tiny images of things stamped into our brain.

Anyway, we do not need to get hung up on the shape of these mental representations. What's important is that we know that they exist. Important is also that we do not only have mental representations of things that we can see and touch like pigs, cakes, or people. We also have concepts of abstract entities: of emotions like love or hate, of religious ideas like god and hell, of fictional characters like Darth Vader and Harry Potter, of imaginary beings like dragons and fairies, or of scholarly concepts like Romanticism and, yes, representation. In fact, the aim of this book is to anchor a concept of Cultural Studies in your mind. Moreover, what's also important is that these mental representations are organized in our minds in clusters and classes. This can be shown

in experiments because people are a little bit faster at processing concepts that are somehow related to each other. It is therefore safe to assume that in our minds the concepts for animals are clustered together, the concepts for food, and – for some people – the concepts for doing Cultural Studies. This is why Hall speaks of "a system of representation" and even a "conceptual map" (4).

conceptual map

But the mental representations are in our minds and can't get out. We need another system of representation that allows us to communicate our ideas. We need language. Or better languages in the plural, as we can use spoken words, written words, or images to express our thoughts. Spoken words consist of a sequence of sounds, written ones of a sequence of letters; only images are a different matter. But on a more abstract level, they all have something in common: they are signs. As Hall explains: "These signs stand for or represent the concepts and the conceptual relations between them which we carry around in our heads and together they make up the meaning-systems of our culture" (4). Signs are also arranged in clusters and classes. This is obvious with spoken and written words, which can be assigned to different grammatical classes like nouns, verbs, and adjectives. Of course, there are also clusters of words that derive from the same root, include similar sounds, or are spelt similarly. It's less obvious when it comes to images because they are – we could also say they consist of – different kinds of signs.

signs

Images – drawn, photographed, or filmed – are iconic signs. This means that these signs resemble what they represent. A picture of a pig looks like a pig. This similarity can make us sometimes forget that we are dealing with signs at all; it may seem that we have immediate access to the referent. But we are reminded of the fact that we are dealing with signs, for example, when we look at paintings from the Middle Ages that follow very different conventions of representation than the ones we are used to and take for granted. But even looking at drawings of pigs in children's books can have the same effect, as they (and other animals) are sometimes represented in quite an abstract fashion, maybe even only by a few dots of pink and black arranged in a specific manner.

iconic signs

There is another type of signs that is not really relevant for my argument here and that I only mention for the sake of completion, and that's indexical signs. Such signs are connected to the referents that they represent in a cause-effect relationship. Smoke, for example, is an indexical sign for fire, as fire causes smoke. By the same token, the footprints that Robinson Crusoe finds in the sand in Daniel Defoe's famous novel and that alert him to the fact that he is no longer alone on the island are an indexical sign for the people that have walked there and left them. Even an analogue photograph can, from one perspective at least, be seen as an indexical sign, because the object photographed has, by way of a complex chemical process, left a trace on the film.

indexical signs

By contrast, written and spoken words are what scholars call symbolic signs. The word "pig," both as a spoken combination of sounds and a written combination of letters, does not resemble the referent, the animal out there in the real world. This is immediately apparent if you call to mind that the animal is referred to by very different

symbolic signs

words in other languages. The German "Schwein" is very different from the English "pig" although English and German are closely related languages. The question, therefore, is how do speakers of English know that the word they have to use to communicate about the animal they are thinking about at the moment is "pig," and how do speakers of German know it's "Schwein"?

The answer to this question is: through the code. The code, as Hall explains, "sets up the correlation between our conceptual system and our language system in such a way that, every time we think of a [pig], the code tells us to use the English word ['pig]" (7). The relationship between a word and a concept is completely arbitrary. That means that it is completely random. The English word for the concept *pig* could just as well be "tree" or "chocolate" or even "liberalism." But everybody who speaks English knows that the correct word is "pig" because the relationship between concept and word has been fixed by the code. The code ties the system of mental representations, the concepts, to the different systems of signs: spoken languages, written languages, and different forms of images. It's like a contract that has been signed by all the involved parties without them remembering.

These preliminary insights into how representation works allow us, as Hall points out, to elaborate on his definition of culture as shared meanings: "One way of thinking about 'culture', then, is in terms of these shared conceptual maps, shared language systems and the *codes which govern the relationships of translation between them.* Codes fix the relationships between concepts and signs. They stabilize meanings within different languages and cultures" (7; his italics). In other words, being part of a culture or at least understanding that culture means to know that culture's conceptual map, its language, and the code. As I said in the introduction, I have no clue about cricket. I know neither its terminology nor the concepts the words represent. But I am, for example, part of an international football fan culture (or soccer culture, as it is called in the United States). I know what "offside" is (and I could even explain it!) or a "false nine" – and I obviously know the words that represent these concepts.

In addition, these preliminary insights allow us to evaluate the three major theories about representation that exist in western culture. Knowing what we know by now, it is clear that two of them are bad, and one of them is good, as it explains well how representation works. The first of these theories is what Hall calls the "intentional approach" (10). This theory claims that words mean what those who use them want them to mean. That's obviously wrong. Imagine talking to somebody who says "pig" when they mean "Tuesday" or "dinner" when they mean "run" and so on, or even makes up combinations of sounds that you have never heard and to which you can ascribe no meaning whatsoever. Communication would be impossible, and communication is the whole point of language. Of course, whenever we speak, write, or draw, we communicate our ideas and often also our intentions, but we must do this in a way that others can understand us. As the philosopher Ludwig Wittgenstein pointed out long ago

(1953), we cannot have a private language. Language is by definition a social pheno-menon, as it is all about sharing meanings.

In fact, the only people who can for a while and only to a certain degree lay claim to a private language are small children when they are still learning to speak. Take my older son, for example. He is growing up bilingually because his mother speaks Russian with him, and I German. Thus, when he was maybe three years old, he knew two words for "stroller": the German "Kinderwagen" and the Russian "koljaska." However, for a long time he referred to his stroller only by the term "nana," which exists in neither of these languages. And he used a number of other words that don't exist in any language for other things. In a sense, then, he had a bit of a private language. But even this language wasn't entirely private. He could only use words like "nana" successfully because his parents knew what he meant. We shared the code he had created. But the whole point of language is that we can also talk to people who are not around us all the time and who we may have never met before. And for this to happen, language cannot be private. That's why my son eventually stopped saying "nana" and started using the other terms provided by the language systems of Russian and German.

The second theory of representation that Hall discusses, the "reflective approach" (10), is also unconvincing. According to this approach, we know which word to use because the word copies – in other words: reflects – some of the qualities of the referent it represents. This idea that signs imitate the object they stand for makes some sense with regard to iconic signs, but quickly reaches its limits even there, as I pointed out a few paragraphs above. For symbolic signs it does not make sense at all. Neither written words nor spoken sounds resemble what they represent in any way. There are also, as I just stressed, different words in different languages for the same concept and the same referent. The idea that the correct combination of sounds somewhat miraculously emerges from the objects, people, or ideas that it represents is downright silly. The only exception is what scholars of literature call onomatopoeia – a rhetorical device that tries to copy the sounds of a person, animal, or object. But even here different languages go different ways for the same sounds. A German cock sitting on a dung heap cries "Kikeriki"; an English one sitting on a similar dung heap cries "cock-a-doo-dle-doo." The reflective approach, therefore, is wrong, too.

reflective approach

The reflective approach to representation is an essentialist theory. It claims that the meaning of things, people, and events somehow resides inside of them and is then merely reflected by language. But essentialism is by no means restricted to this theory of representation, it is a much larger phenomenon that we will encounter again and again throughout this book. In chapter 6, for example, we will see that there are people who believe that someone's gender is determined completely by their genitals, genes, and chromosomes and not at all influenced by their social surrounding. Men and wo-men (these are the only categories such an essentialist position recognizes) behave as they do because of their inner core. Their behavior merely reflects their inner essence. Cultural Studies is extremely critical about such essentialist approaches and rejects

essentialism

them for good reasons. As we will see, when they are concerned with gender and similar social issues, they are not more convincing than the essentialist reflective approach to representation.

<div style="margin-left:auto;"></div>

The theory of representation that Cultural Studies favors and that is by far the most convincing of the three theories is what Hall calls the "constructionist approach" (11). In a way, this approach is the logical consequence of the recognition that meaning is neither inherent in the things themselves nor determined by the users of language. If meaning doesn't come from any of these sources, it must come from the systems of representation themselves. It is created by these systems; it is constructed. Or, as Hall puts it: "Things don't *mean.* We *construct* meaning, using representational systems – concepts and signs. […] [I]t is not the material world which conveys meaning: it is the language system or whatever system we are using to represent our concepts" (11; his italics). What's important to note is that this does not mean that the world out there does not exist. The natural world – humans, animals, and plants – and the things produced by humans are real, but they do not mean anything by themselves. Nothing in the world has meaning outside of representation because it is representation that creates the meaning, that constructs it. That's why Hall eventually defines representation as the "production of meaning through language" (14).

In fact, the idea that meaning is constructed is a key insight of Cultural Studies, and the theory of constructionism is in many ways the foundation of the whole field. Constructionism therefore runs through this book as a common thread. In the chapters that follow we will see that, among other things, gender, race, memory, and even truth are constructed.

This is of course counterintuitive and I imagine that some of you are shaking their heads right now. (At least that's what always happens at this moment in my lecture.) I completely understand that what I am saying might be hard to digest. But that something is counterintuitive does not mean that it is wrong. The intentional and reflective approaches to representation may strike us at first as quite convincing, but if we do only little thinking (as we did above), we see that they cannot be correct. When it comes to the constructionist approach – to language, but also to gender, race, memory, and truth – the opposite is true. The longer we think about it, the more it makes sense. And, as I know from personal experience but also from many students who have taken the lecture on which this book is based, the insight into the constructedness of all meaning can be quite liberating in a number of ways. For one thing it liberates us from the idea that there is one natural way in which we have to behave.

Importantly, that meaning is constructed in the process of representation does not mean that it isn't real, and that it doesn't have real effects. This becomes immediately apparent if we consider an example that is often used to illustrate the constructionist approach to representation and that Hall himself uses, too (26-27): traffic lights. German traffic lights consist of three different light sources: red at the top, yellow in the middle,

Marginal notes:
- constructio-nist ap-proach
- Constructi-onism
- a counterin-tuitive idea
- traffic lights

and green at the bottom. As you all know, red means stop, and green means go. But there is nothing inherent in the color red that means stop, and nothing inherent in the color green that means go. They are symbolic signs. In other contexts, red can mean passion, sin, or danger. It is used to represent communism, but also the Republican Party in the United States. Think of the "red states" on election day. In Germany, by contrast, red represents the Social Democratic Party on election day, whereas green represents the, well, Green Party, which bears this name because green has long been associated with environmentalism. In other contexts, however, green stands for envy as in the phrase "green with envy."

Accordingly, "Red and Green work in the language of traffic lights because 'Stop' and 'Go' are the meanings which have been assigned to them in our culture by the code or conventions governing this culture" (12). But traffic lights have existed for more than 150 years in western culture, and from the very beginning, they have been using the colors red and green to signal stop and go (Klocknau). Accordingly, the meaning has by now been entirely naturalized for us; it appears to us as if red and green naturally and automatically mean stop and go, and this meaning has even been transferred to many other contexts. Indeed, naturalization is a very common cultural process that we will encounter repeatedly throughout this book.

naturaliza-
tion

Of course, because the meanings of red and green have been so firmly established in our culture, we couldn't change them overnight. And it would be a very bad idea to suddenly set up traffic lights that use different colors. It would cause a lot of confusion and many accidents. But in theory, we could use any other two colors instead of red and green: "This is because what signifies is not the colours themselves but (a) the fact that they are different and can be distinguished from one another; and (b) the fact that they are organized into a particular sequence" (Hall 12). What Hall highlights here are the two key factors that make representation work: difference and combination. As he explains a moment later, "What signifies, what carries meaning […] is not each color in itself nor even the concept or word for it. It is *the difference between Red and Green* which signifies" (12; his italics). Meaning – produced by representation through language – depends on difference. And as I show in later chapters, this is true beyond language and concerns all kinds of phenomena like race (where often the difference between White and non-White is crucial in western cultures), gender (think of the difference between men and women), or even space (which is often organized alongside binary oppositions like private vs. public, or civilization vs. wilderness).

difference

But the meaning of signs also depends on their combination. In German traffic lights, this is particularly apparent with the color yellow which is lit for a few seconds when the lights change from red to green, or from green to red. Depending on which color precedes it and which color follows it, the meaning of yellow changes. If it is preceded by red and comes on while the red light is also still on (and followed by green), it means something like "Get ready to drive"; if it is preceded by green (and followed by red), it means something like "Hit the brakes and stop." And this is true for all signs in all kinds

combination

of languages. Their meaning is determined not only by their link to a mental concept (fixed by the code) or them being different from each other; it also depends on the relationship of a specific sign to the signs used in combination with it. As Hall puts it, "Meaning [...] is 'relational'" (13).

real effects

The example of traffic lights also illustrates nicely that meanings have very real effects, even though they are constructed. It is "just" a convention that we stop at red lights, but if we don't the consequences can be fatal. And to give just one example that goes far beyond the level of signs: As we will see in chapter 6, the concept of race – the idea that there are distinct human races – is also just a construction. But the racism that is has fueled is very real, and it has been used to justify discrimination, violence, slavery, and genocide.

But I am running ahead of things. The implications of our insight that meaning is constructed, and that it is the system of representation where these constructions occur are far-reaching and not easy to digest. Before I spell them out systematically, I want to rephrase Hall's theory of representation, as he does himself, in the far more influential terminology of the Swiss linguist Ferdinand de Saussure, who is often considered the father of modern linguistics. Saussure's theory of representation is arguably the most influential one of all times, and therefore you need to know his terms and ideas. In fact, Hall only develops his own theory to help us understand Saussure's.

Ferdinand de Saussure

To begin with, in order to explain how representation works – how mental representations are tied by way of a code to signs – it makes a lot of sense, as Hall does, to talk about two systems of representation. But as Saussure pointed out long ago, in reality these two systems cannot be separated from each other. The material side – what Hall calls the sign – immediately evokes the idea – what Hall calls the concept – and the other way around. You cannot hear the word "pig," read it, or see a picture of a pig without immediately thinking of the concept "pig." And you cannot think of a pig without the word or a visual image of a pig coming to your mind.

conceptual and material side

Saussure therefore thinks of the sign as comprising both the material side and the conceptual one. He calls the material side – written and spoken words or images – the signifier, and the conceptual side – the idea or the concept that words and images refer to – the signified. Together, a signifier and a signified form a sign. You can imagine signifier and signified like two sides of the same coin or a sheet of paper. You cannot have one without the other. Saussure's concept of the sign is thus larger than Hall's. It comprises what Hall calls the sign and what he calls the concept. The vast majority of scholars has followed Saussure, including Hall, who only keeps the two sides apart for a while to explain representation better. From now on, when I say "sign" I am always referring to an entity that comprises signifier and signified.

signifier and signified

Saussure was also the first one to point out the other important elements of representation that we have identified: that signs form a system, that meaning depends on difference, or that it's the relationship between different signs that is important, and

that it is therefore the selection (based on difference) and combination of signs that produces meaning. Hall stresses difference more than selection, Saussure stressed selection more, but both mean the same thing. Signs do not mean anything in themselves but only because they are different from other signs. Therefore, we select them from the system of signs (and combine them with other signs) to produce a specific meaning.

<div style="float:right">selection and combination</div>

What is more, when Hall writes that signs (and mental representations) are organized into clusters and classes, he was following Saussure's lead. Saussure argued that signs (comprising, as we have established, signifier and signified) were organized into different paradigms – according to sound, spelling, grammatical class, word family, meaning, and so on. According to Saussure, when people speak or write they select items from paradigms – for example, an article, a noun, and a verb – and combine them to syntagms, that is, phrases or sentences like "The pig snorts." The distinction between paradigmatic and syntagmatic relationship is very helpful, and I will draw on it below when I consider how fashion functions as a language in the final section of this chapter. But before we get there, we need to consider the implications of the constructionist approach to representation.

<div style="float:right">paradigms and syntagms</div>

The Implications of the Constructionist Approach

The implications of the constructionist approach to representation and meaning are far-reaching and almost impossible to overstate. First of all, there is no meaning without representation. To stress this once more, external reality exists independently of representation, but it does not mean anything without it. Everything only becomes meaningful through language. Accordingly, representations link us to the world, enabling us to make sense of it and communicate about it, but, at the same time, they also separate us from the world because they impose a filter between us and the world. (By the way, Cultural Studies scholars are not the only people who argue that this is the case. Many scholars form psychology and biology, too, stress that we constantly construct the world in our minds.)

<div style="float:right">no meaning without representation</div>

Secondly, if language does not simply mirror reality, as the reflective approach wrongly claims, then language determines how we perceive the world. Not only has nothing in the world meaning without representation; the language that we are using determines how we understand the world. Speakers of different languages perceive the world – at least to a certain degree – differently. As, once again, the philosopher Ludwig Wittgenstein pointedly put it, "The limits of my language mean the limits of my world" (86). Linguists refer to this phenomenon as linguistic determinism because it is our language that determines how we perceive the world, or as linguistic relativism because our perception of the world is never absolute and only ever relative, depending on the language that mediates our perception of it.

<div style="float:right">linguistic determinism and linguistic relativism</div>

During the 1980s, when the Cold War was still ongoing, U.S. president Ronald Reagan claimed that there was no word for "freedom" in the Russian language, implying that

<div style="float:right">Ronald Reagan</div>

this explained why the Russian people were content to live under an authoritarian regime that did not grant them basic liberties (Cohen). The Russians, Reagan suggested, had no idea what freedom was – it was not part of their conceptual map of the world – because it did not exist in their language. Reagan was of course wrong and later retracted his claim – and the events already taking shape in the Soviet Union at that time, which led to its collapse, show that speakers of Russian know very well what freedom is. But if Reagan's claim was true, the anecdote would be a nice example to illustrate linguistic relativism. However, there are many examples of really existing differences between languages. Here are just a few.

As I said earlier, my sons are growing up bilingually as speakers of German and Russian. Interestingly, there are two basic terms for the color blue in the Russian language, opposed to only one in German (or English). I doubt that this makes a big difference for my sons who have two conceptual maps – Russian and German – in their minds and who effortlessly switch from one to the other, but it shows that different languages make different distinctions that – remember that meaning depends on difference – influence how we perceive the world. And since I talked a lot about pigs in the previous section, here's another example. German has only one word for pig, "Schwein," and this word refers both to the living animal outside on the meadow and the cooked one that is served for dinner. In English, however, the living animal is a "pig," whereas the one that has been cooked is "pork." That's because after the Norman invasion of 1066, the aristocratic elite continued to speak French for a while, and this affected the English language. When a farmer slaughtered a pig, it was a "pig"; when it ended up cooked on the plate of the king it was "pork" because that's the French word for meat from a pig. When the elite began to speak English, they imported words like "pork" from French. Thus, to speak of a "roasted pig" does not make sense in English.

You might be inclined to say now that this is surely not a big deal, and that the conceptual maps of speakers of German, Russian, and English do not differ that much and that therefore the claim that they perceive the world differently is overstated. And you are right, especially with regard to English and German because both are Germanic languages, which means that they have developed from the same older language and are therefore very similar in many ways. What is more, both the English- and the German-speaking countries are part of what is often called the western world, and their cultures therefore share many characteristics. But if we compare languages from more different cultures or even the historical development of a single language, much bigger differences emerge.

In fact, we don't have to go very far. Take, for example, certain differences between Spanish, a Romance language, and German. The Spanish word for key is "la llave." A key is of course an object, but the word's grammatical gender in Spanish is feminine. The German word for key is "der Schlüssel"; its grammatical gender is masculine. Interestingly, this difference has an impact on what speakers of Spanish and German associate with keys. Speakers of Spanish associate with keys characteristics that are

pig and pork

differences between languages

Spanish and German

traditionally considered feminine such as smallness and loveliness, whereas speakers of German tend to think of keys as hard, heavy, or useful, thus associating the concept of key with characteristics traditionally perceived as masculine (Boroditsky et al.). (Why there are such specific associations tied to gender will be discussed in chapter 6.) Speakers of Spanish and German, we can therefore conclude, really perceive keys differently.

And if we compare western and non-western cultures and their languages the differences become even more significant. For example, speakers of German (and other western languages, for that matter) have an egocentric spatial grid. I am currently sitting in the Historical Reading Room in the library in Tübingen. There is a big door to my right and a smaller one behind me. To my left, there is a wall with bookshelves, and in front of me, across the aisle, there are about fifteen other people facing me. I draw on the concepts that the languages that I speak – German and English – provide for making sense of spatial relations: left, right, behind me, in front of me etc. Thus, the system of representation that I have available makes me make sense of the space around me by placing people and objects in relation to my own position. I would be hard pressed to say if the big door is north, south, east, or west of me, and so would probably most, if not all other people in the room. And if somebody asked me for directions to the cafeteria, I would say, turn right, right again, and then left, and they would probably find their way without any difficulty. Imagine what would happen if I told them to go south, then west, and then south again.

By contrast, speakers of Guugu Yimidhirr, a language spoken by an Indigenous community in northeastern Australia, have a geocentric spatial grid. They do not think of spatial relations in terms of left or right, or behind or ahead, but in terms of north, south, east, and west because these are the categories that their language provides for them. If I turn around, the big door to the reading room will no longer be to my right but suddenly to my left. If a speaker of Guugu Yimidhirr was sitting where I am sitting right now and turned around, the door would still be in the same direction: northwest of them. (I only know that because I just checked on Google Maps.) Because of this, speakers of Guugu Yimidhirr have a superior sense of spatial orientation compared to speakers of other languages (Levinson). Their language makes them make sense of reality in a way that is much different from speakers of languages like English or German.

The example I just discussed is a good illustration of how speakers of different languages sometimes perceive physical reality differently. Let me turn to a good example of how speakers of medieval and contemporary German perceive(d) social reality differently. Like English, modern German has one word for uncle: "Onkel." It doesn't matter if you are referring to your father's brother or your mother's. Both are your "Onkel." Medieval German, however, had two different terms for uncle. The brother of the father was called "veter"; the brother of the mother was called "œheim." This distinction was necessary for a society in which family ties were far more important

western and non-western cultures

Guugu Yimidhirr

two different terms for uncle

than in modern societies. The relationship between nephew or niece and the brothers of their mother was supposed to be particularly close and affectionate and thus qualitatively different from that to the brothers of the father. If the parents died, an "œheim" was the natural choice for guardian. It is therefore no coincidence that the grail king that Percival encounters and eventually redeems in Wolfram von Eschenbach's epic poem is his "œheim" and not his "veter." To medieval audiences, this must have appeared logical and particularly meaningful. On modern audiences, by contrast, this point is usually lost unless a footnote alerts them to it. Because of their language, they perceive of the world differently than Germans living in the Middle Ages.

Over the course of the centuries, the "œheim"-"veter" distinction disappeared from the German language, and "Onkel," borrowed from French, replaced both. As family ties became less important, the conceptual difference disappeared. Since languages are usually very economic, one of the words disappeared, too, as it was no longer needed and only survived for a while in regional dialects. This shows something that you are of course aware of but that I have not addressed so far: Languages are ever-changing. The conceptual map is constantly redrawn, and the words of the language reflect this change. Sometimes a new concept emerges and a term for it is needed. For example, before the advent of internet, there was no need for a word that expressed the activity of searching for something online. When this became possible, the generic term for it was for a while "to yahoo" after the most popular search engine at the time (which, in turn, was named after a human-like brutish people in Jonathan Swift's novel *Gulliver's Travel* [1726]). As Google replaced Yahoo and came to dominate the market of search engines, "to google" became, in many languages, the term for an activity most of us engage in every day.

Sometimes, however, something has existed for a very long time but has not been given a name. It is therefore – to a certain degree at least – unspeakable. Moreover, since nothing, as we have established, carries meaning without representation, this "something" is also not really graspable. Remember Saussure's point that signifier and signified are inextricably tied together. If we do not have a word for something, we also do not have a concept of it. Here's just one example: Same-sex sexual activity has doubtlessly existed throughout the ages, but the term "homosexuality" only entered the English language in the 1890s, as a search for the term in the *Oxford English Dictionary* shows. This is not the place yet to talk about gender and sexuality. I do that in chapter 6. But you can easily imagine that it makes a big difference *if* there is a term for something in the language that makes it graspable and enables communication about it, and *what* that term is – if it carries derogatory associations or not. In any case, this example, too, shows that the words and concepts that are available in a given language determine a specific take on reality. That's the implication of the constructionist approach to representation that you need to take to heart.

Languages are ever-changing

the term "homosexuality"

Semiotics

At the end of the first section of this chapter, I have stressed the importance of Ferdinand de Saussure in developing the constructionist approach to language. As a linguist, Saussure was mostly interested in studying language in the narrow sense. But as my references to images and the example of the traffic lights have already shown, not only spoken or written words are signs. Saussure was well aware of this and even anticipated a general study of signs, which he called "semiology." But he never developed this idea any further. Other scholars, however, picked up on his suggestion and systematically explored how different cultural phenomena function as signs and how, indeed, culture as such can be understood as a language. This development is often referred to as the linguistic turn in the humanities and social sciences, and the umbrella term for this approach to culture is quite similar to the one Saussure originally proposed: it's semiotics.

the linguistic turn

Since Cultural Studies is, unlike Literary Studies, not only interested in written texts, but in all cultural phenomena, the semiotic approach is extremely important for it because it makes it possible to treat these phenomena and indeed culture as a text. As Stuart Hall puts it, "since all cultural objects convey meaning, and all cultural practices depend on meaning, they must make use of signs; and in so far as they do, they must work like language works" (21). That's why we can speak of the language of film, the language of food, or the language of fashion. That's also why Cultural Studies scholars often refer to these and other cultural phenomena as texts (and why I put "text" once in quotation marks in the introduction): because they can be "read," that is, they can be analyzed and interpreted as combinations of signs that carry meaning just as a text in the literal sense can be analyzed and interpreted.

culture as a text

Out of these examples I just mentioned this is surely most apparent with regard to film. What we see on a TV or cinema screen are obviously visual signs. And it is not that difficult to establish a parallel between language in the narrow sense and the language of film. A single shot, that is, what is recorded when the camera is started and then stopped, can be seen as the equivalent to a word. A scene, which consists of several shots, could be considered a sentence, and the rules that the filmmakers follow to join shots in the editing process are like the rules of grammar in language in the narrow sense. And a sequence, that is, a cluster of scenes could be seen as the equivalent of a chapter in a novel. However, on second thought, this parallelization does not work that neatly. Words can be quite long, but a shot can be several minutes long. And a single scene can consist of dozens of shots. Does it really make sense to consider it the equivalent of a sentence, then? Personally, I think it doesn't. But this doesn't invalidate my larger point here.

the language of film

Clearly, film consists of signs , even though we have trouble to say where one ends and the next begins. And, equally clearly, selection and combination determine the meaning of a film just as much as they determine that of language in the narrow sense. Film-

filmic signs

makers combine shots to scenes and scenes to sequences, and they constantly have to decide if they want to show us something in a close-up, focusing on a specific detail or the face of one of the characters, a close shot, which would show us a character from the chest upward, or a different kind of shot. There is a paradigm of available shots from which they choose, and the kind of shots they pick have a huge impact on the meaning of the film, as does the syntagm, the way in which the selected shots are arranged in a sequence.

Not all of us may be able to make a film, but we all can read a film. We have watched so many that we know the rules by which at least western films work by heart, just as we know the rules by which the languages we speak work, even if we are unable to spell them out. In much the same way, we all speak the language of fashion. We are all more or less consciously aware of the fact that the clothes that we are wearing are not only functional objects but signs that mean something. We use them to express who we are, and we often dress for an occasion. Obviously, selection and combination are as important here as with language in the narrow sense. We select certain items of clothing and not others from our wardrobe in the morning, and we combine them in specific ways. In the terminology of Saussure, we select from different paradigmatic classes – underwear, socks, shirts, pants, skirts etc. – and combine the selected items to a syntagmatic sequence. Our selection of items is guided by our unconscious or conscious knowledge of what certain items of clothing mean in our culture (and this meaning hinges on them being different from other items). A tie, for example, signifies – it's time that I use this verb – formality; an evening gown signifies elegance, and a pair of jeans (usually) casualness. However, as with the color yellow on the traffic lights, context and combination are important. A pair of jeans means one thing when worn with an old t-shirt and sneakers, and quite a different thing when worn with a white shirt, a tie, and black leather shoes.

Importantly, as once again Hall highlights, "not everybody reads fashion in the same way. There are differences of gender, age, class, 'race'" (22) and other identity categories that I discuss in the chapters that follow. Based on identity categories, people belong to different cultures (although they also all belong to, say, American or German culture at the same time) and thus their codes for fashion and other things differ to smaller or larger degrees. I mention this here already because it is important to be aware of the fact that when we are reading cultural phenomena, things very quickly get quite complicated. There are many factors that we need to pay attention to. We cannot just talk about the meaning of jeans, for example, but we must also take into account, for example, which social group we are talking about and various other contextual factors.

But let's return to the foundation of the semiotic approach. I won't go into details here with regard to the language of food because I want to save this topic for the exercises at the end of the chapter. Let me turn instead to something you have no doubt already picked up upon in my discussion of the language of fashion, and that is that when I said that a tie signifies formality and an evening gown signifies elegance, we are talking

about a level of meaning that is different from what we talked about with regard to the meaning of the word "pig" or an image of a pig. This becomes even clearer if we are not dealing with the things themselves (a real tie, or a real evening gown) but with the words "tie" or "evening gown," or images of a tie or an evening gown. The meaning of the words and images is first of all the concepts: an accessory usually worn by men and a special kind of dress usually worn by women. That the one signifies formality, and the other elegance is a different meaning, located at a higher, more cultural level. It is on that level that different groups might disagree about the meaning, but not on the more basic level below. It is therefore important to keep these two levels apart. (And to note that Cultural Studies is, rather obviously, interested in this higher level and not so much in the lower one.)

Drawing on the works of Roland Barthes, a French scholar who demonstrated that wrestling can just as much be analyzed with the semiotic approach as soap powder or cars can, Cultural Studies scholars refer to the basic level of meaning – where an image of a tie signifies a tie – as denotation, and to the higher level of meaning – where an image of a tie (or the tie itself) signifies formality – as connotation. As Hall explains, denotation means "the simple, basic, descriptive level, where consensus is wide and most people would agree on the meaning"; whereas connotation refers to the "broader themes and meanings […] the general beliefs, conceptual frameworks and value systems of society" (23-24). Whereas the denotation of a piece of clothing or any other cultural phenomenon usually remains rather stable across space and time, the connotation often differs – and often considerably – from culture to culture. But – and that's important to stress once more – connotations are nevertheless shared, cultural meanings. They need to be distinguished from personal associations. We can imagine somebody who associates a tie with pain because he once had an accident while wearing a tie, and who is now always reminded of this pain when he sees a tie or reads about one. But this is a – in this case: tragic – personal meaning, not a shared one.

denotation and connotation

Connotations are of course of interest to Literary Studies just as much as to Cultural Studies. The only difference is that scholars of literature investigate the connotations of certain representations in literary texts, whereas Cultural Studies scholars are, as we established in the introduction, interested in all kinds of cultural phenomena, and interpret them. Here is just one example of how a literary text can employ culturally shared connotations to produce a specific meaning:

the study of connotations

> Blanche comes around the corner, carrying a valise. She looks at a slip of paper, then at the building, then again at the slip and again at the building. Her expression is one of shocked disbelief. Her appearance is incongruous to this setting. She is daintily dressed in a white suit with a fluffy bodice, necklace and earrings of pearl, white gloves and hat, looking as if she were arriving at a summer tea or cocktail party in the garden district. (Williams 5)

This is the beginning of Tennessee Williams's play *A Streetcar Named Desire* (1947). The protagonist, Blanche DuBois, is introduced and characterized here. It is apparent

A Streetcar Named Desire

that she feels out of place in the mixed-race working-class neighborhood in New Orleans where the play is set. That's why her "expression is one of shocked disbelief," and her "appearance is incongruous to this setting." Obviously, she would prefer a more distinguished middle- or upper-class environment, as these are the social classes she feels more allegiance to. This is not only indicated by her behavior but also – and that's what we are interested in at the moment – by the connotations of her clothes. Everything that she is wearing – her dress, her jewelry, and her hat and gloves – signify elegance and wealth, and thus a class membership that is at odds with the location she is now in. (We learn later in the play that she is much poorer than she pretends, but, as we will see in chapter 6, there is more to class membership than economic capital.) What is more, she is dressed in white, and her first name means "white" in French. The connotations of Whiteness in western culture are purity and innocence, and that's exactly the impression Blanche wants to create, and the play wants to create exactly this understanding of her character at this point (if only to complicate things later).

And here is, finally, an example from *The Hunger Games*. The still is from the first movie and shows the reaping, a cruel lottery that determines which boy and girl from District 12 have to fight and (most likely) die in that year's Hunger Games.

Fig. 2: Reaping scene from *The Hunger Games*

I have chosen this example because connotations work in a particularly complex way here. In fact, we could say that next to the level of denotation we can identify two levels of connotation here. On the first level, the clothes and hairstyle of the girls and boys that we see on their way to the reaping signify simplicity and poverty. We know from the story that they are wearing their best clothes for the occasion and that they have taken special care in the morning to clean themselves. Yet, their clothes are plain, and

the girls wear their hair in simple braids because they cannot afford anything fancier and don't have the time for more elaborate hairdressing. This level of connotation would be available to most people watching the film.

For audiences familiar with the history of Nazi Germany, however, there is arguably another level of connotation available. The clothes and the hairstyle of the boys and girls evoke memories of the 1940s and 1950s. They are dressed and wear their hair as young people back then often did. If we add to this the larger context of the reaping scene – a totalitarian state treating a significant part of its population as second-class citizens and sending some of them to their deaths in a highly ritualized manner – what is happening in the film also evokes the connotation of the Holocaust. (If you haven't watched the film yet or only a long time ago, you may find this far-fetched. But once you have (re-)watched it, you will surely agree with me.) The Capitol is thus early on aligned with Nazism, whereas the people of District 12 are associated with the Jews. The roles of good and evil are thus clearly defined.

Interestingly, this specific connotation is not evoked by the description of the reaping scene in the novel but only in the film. It is something the film can do, and the novel can't. Clearly, then, there are other factors besides signs and semiotics that we need to consider if we want to understand representation properly. That's what the next two chapters are about.

Questions for Self-Study

1. Visualize the relationship between the two systems of representation, the referents, and the code as Hall describes it. Create a model.
2. Some people cannot distinguish red from green. Why do traffic lights still work for them?
3. Apply what you have learned about semiotics to food. In what ways does it function like a language?
4. What were the connotations of the face mask in your country before the coronavirus pandemic? How did these connotations change over the course of the pandemic, and what are they now?

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3 Medium and Discourse

By now, we have a basic understanding of how representation works. We have learned that systems of representation construct meaning and do not merely reflect it, and we have identified the selection and combination of different signs as key processes in the construction of meaning. Most of the examples I have provided in the last chapter have focused on how different languages (in the narrow sense) make those who use them perceive and represent the world differently. In this chapter we continue our discussion of representation. We remain on the level of systems of representation but look at them from two different angles. My goal is to explain how the construction of meaning through acts of representation is affected by factors beyond the difference between languages in the narrow sense.

I begin with the concept of medium because different media can be conceived of as different systems of representation. As we will see, the medium has considerable impact on the construction of meaning. I already hinted at this at the end of the previous chapter when I highlighted a difference on the level of connotation between the novel *The Hunger Games* and the film based on it. The concept of medium will help us understand more precisely the differences between the novel *The Hunger Games*, as a specific use of the medium of written language, and the film version. Generally speaking, it makes a difference if we tell a story with words or images or a combination of both. It is never quite the same story; its meaning changes because of the medium we use.

In the second and longer section of this chapter, we will then tackle the concept that the students in my lectures find the most challenging one of the semester: discourse. I will introduce you to a very specific understanding of this concept, which is based on the writings of Michel Foucault, a French philosopher and historian. I will also introduce his closely related ideas about the relationship between power and knowledge, which are in many ways a development of his discourse theory into a slightly different direction. To spill the beans here already, what Foucault says about discourse and truth is basically what Stuart Hall, drawing on Ferdinand de Saussure, says about representation and meaning. Just as there is no meaning without representation, there is, as Foucault has shown, no truth outside of discourse. (And we will figure out together what discourse is.)

You might wonder now why we then need the concept of discourse. We need it because there are two important differences between Foucault's theory of discourse and Hall's (that is, Saussure's) theory of representation. First, Foucault's theory of discourse concerns not only texts (in the broad sense defined in the previous chapter) but also practices. And second, as Hall himself explains, it "marked a significant development in the *constructionist* approach to representation." Its emphasis on "the relation between dis-

effects of re-
presenta-
tion on our
lives

course, knowledge and power […] rescued representation from the clutches of a purely formal theory and gave it a historical, practical and 'worldly' context of operation" (Hall 32; his italics). In other words, Foucault's theory of discourse allows us to understand the positive but also negative effects of representation on our lives much better than the theory I discussed in the previous chapter.

Medium

to communi-
cate with
the dead

Many years ago – don't ask how this happened! – I attended a séance. The woman who had organized the meeting claimed that she could put people into contact with dead relatives and friends and enable them to speak to them. She couldn't of course, and I knew that before I went into the meeting, but I was curious how she would try to trick us. I am telling you this because a person who claims to be able to allow the living to communicate with the dead is called a medium. You cannot speak to the dead directly, this supernatural theory of communication goes, and you wouldn't hear what they are saying to you. Thus, you need somebody to make an exchange possible, and that's what a medium does. The medium – allegedly! – allows you to speak through it to the dead.

medium

Indeed – and that's why I am revealing this slightly embarrassing episode about myself – what a medium allegedly does during a séance is exactly what the different media that Cultural Studies is interested in do as well. Broadly speaking, we can define a medium, as *Merriam Webster*, an important American dictionary, does, as "a particular form or system of communication (such as newspapers, radio, or television)." We could also say that a medium is a specific system of representation. From a certain perspective, language in the narrow sense is a medium, and so are all other systems of signs, not only the ones that rely on elaborate technology like the ones that the dictionary mentions.

"The me-
dium is the
message"

What is important to remember now is that systems of representation do not merely reflect meaning but, as we saw in the previous chapter, produce meaning. By the same token, media do not merely transmit a preexisting meaning from sender to receiver. This is taken to the extreme in the example of the séance. The dead don't speak through the medium, but the medium makes up what they are allegedly telling her. In this case, it's really true what Marshall McLuhan, one of the most important figures in Media Studies, once said about media in general: "The medium is the message" (7). However, when it comes to the media Cultural Studies is interested in, we shouldn't take McLuhan's famous sentence literally. He didn't mean that a medium completely determines the meaning of whatever message it is transmitting. Rather, he meant that a medium has a significant impact on the message. In other words, a medium shapes but does not completely determine meaning.

And this is obviously true. It makes a difference if you convey a message to somebody by talking to them directly, calling them, writing them an email, recording a voice message, recording a short video, or drawing them a series of images. It will affect your

choice of words and your syntax. And if you record your voice, your tone of voice and other elements contribute to the overall meaning. If you record a video, your facial expression, the camera angle, the distance of your face from the camera and other factors become part of the message and therefore of the meaning as well. Thus, even if the meaning you wish to convey is fairly trivial and straightforward, it will change at least slightly when you employ different media to convey it. The medium influences the meaning.

<div style="float:right; font-style:italic;">The medium influences the meaning</div>

The differences between the novel *The Hunger Games* and the film version, which I touched upon at the end of the previous chapter, are a case in point. They go far beyond the different connotations a specific scene can evoke. A novel is a very particular use of the medium of written language. (Some might even say that a novel is a specific medium, but I would rather consider it a genre, a concept that I discuss in the next chapter. We could also consider the book a medium, but let's not make things too complicated here.) A film is an audiovisual medium. This affects the way they tell the "same" story in multiple ways. I will only discuss one difference here, that of perspective.

<div style="float:right;">the novel and the film *The Hunger Games*</div>

Written texts, especially when they tell fictional stories, that is, stories that have been made up, are often really good at letting their readers experience the events through the eyes of one or more characters. In *The Hunger Games* novels, Katniss is not only the protagonist but also the narrator. It is her voice that tells us the story, and we perceive everything that happens from her point of view – both literally in that we see what she sees and metaphorically in that we share her thoughts and feelings. Here's the beginning of the first novel:

<div style="float:right;">point of view</div>

> When I wake up, the other side of the bed is cold. My fingers stretch out, seeking Prim's warmth but finding only the rough canvas cover of the mattress. She must have had bad dreams and climbed in with our mother. Of course she did. This is the day of the reaping.
> I prop myself up on one elbow. There's enough light in the bedroom to see them. My little sister, Prim, curled up on her side, cocooned in my mother's body, their cheeks pressed together. In sleep, my mother looks younger, still worn but not so beaten-down. Prim's face is as fresh as a raindrop, as lovely as the primrose for which she was named. My mother was very beautiful once, too. Or so they tell me. (Collins 3)

As the two paragraphs show already, what's going on in Katniss's mind is at least as important as what's happening in the world that she lives in. Katniss speculates about her sister's nightmare and compares her mother's looks when sleeping to when she is awake. This makes her remember what people have told her about what her mother looked like when she was younger, before Katniss was born or when she was a small child. As readers we thus learn immediately that the mother's life must have taken a turn for the worse at some point, and later we find out that this happened when Katniss's father died.

All this information cannot be conveyed in the film because the film cannot move into Katniss's mind as the novel can. She has to talk to somebody for the audience to learn what she thinks or feels. In fact, in the film, Katniss (Jennifer Lawrence) is also the most important character, and she is present in most scenes, but we do not see things from her perspective. For that to happen, the camera would need to be where her face is. This would make for a very odd viewing experience indeed and go against the conventions of storytelling in film.

Indeed, showing the action from the exact point of view of a character is very unusual for film in general. A film like *The Lady in the Lake* (1947), which puts the camera for 90 minutes where the face of the protagonist would be, remains an exception. Audiences rejected this style of filmmaking, because the protagonist was invisible unless he stood in front of a mirror. Consequently, Hollywood never repeated the experiment. (This is, by the way, a nice example of how consumption can have an impact on production – a topic that I address in detail in chapter 8.) In fact, even showing only a single scene entirely through the eyes of a character hardly ever happens in film. One rare example is the opening of the horror movie *Halloween* (1978). It lasts several minutes and shows us from the point of view of six-year-old Michael Myers (Will Sandin) – here, the camera really is where his face would be – how he murders his older sister with a knife. In this case, this is mostly done, I think, to avoid showing us the face of the young Michael. (The adult Michael [Nick Castle], on whom the story focuses, wears a mask until the very end.) Most films, however, show us events through the eyes of a character only for short moments, restricting the rendering of the point of view to a shot or two and often not even providing us with a genuine point-of-view shot but one that approximates this position in that the camera is placed roughly where the character was standing.

Films therefore tell their stories differently, and this has of course an impact on the meaning of the story. In the novel, Katniss is a far more complex character than in the film. The readers learn a lot about the traumatic loss of her father and how it is still haunting her. In the film, by contrast, most parts of her backstory are missing, and she appears more determined than haunted. These differences exist although the filmmakers tried to stay fairly close to the novel and employed specifically filmic means to achieve effects similar, but by no means identical to those achieved by the novel. There are, for example, more dialogues in the film than in the novel to allow Katniss to articulate her thoughts and feelings. In the opening scene, Prim wakes up from a nightmare screaming, and is then consoled by Katniss. The shaky camera and the unrhythmic editing, which violate a number of filmic conventions, convey the tension that both Katniss and her sister feel and transfer it to the audience. And at certain moments, the film cuts away from Katniss to have other characters provide the information that she provides as the narrator in the novel. For example, when she finds the nest of tracker jackers, genetically manipulated and thus highly dangerous wasps, she tells us in the novel what they are and where they come from. In the film, this information is provided

conventions of storytelling in film

The Lady in the Lake and *Halloween*

impact on the meaning of the story

by the hosts of the show "The Hunger Games" because we as the audience need it to understand why the story continues in a specific way.

Let me give one more example. Twitter. I am writing this paragraph in May 2023, and a lot is changing on the social media platform at the moment. Currently, users who pay for the privilege can write very long tweets, but until recently – and for users who don't pay this hasn't changed – a single tweet could not exceed 280 characters. Before 2017, the maximum length was only 140 characters. Obviously, these restrictions that the medium imposes on its users have an impact on their messages and thus on the meaning of these messages. Tweets have to be straightforward and simple. There is no space for extensive arguments or nuances, but only for a few short sentences. One area where this has had a palpable effect is the realm of conspiracy theories, of claims that suspect a secret plot behind the pandemic, the war in Ukraine, and many other events.

Twitter

Conspiracy theories are nothing new; in their modern form, they can be traced back to the first decades of the 16ᵗʰ century. And throughout the centuries the conspiracist style of explaining what is allegedly going on has remained relatively stable. Conspiracy theorists usually go to great lengths to prove their claims. They analyze sources and secret communication, draw on eyewitness reports and make inferences, and are obsessed with details. Augustin Barruel's *Memoirs Illustrating the History of Jacobinism* (1797), in which he blames the Freemasons and Illuminati for orchestrating the French Revolution, has footnotes on each of its several hundred pages; David Ray Griffin's *The New Pearl Harbor Revisited* (2008), which claims that 9/11 was an "inside job" conducted by the U.S. government, unfolds its argument on 250 pages, which are followed by 80 pages of notes. Other conspiracy theorists produce two-hour long YouTube videos in which they extensively quote experts and other sources.

Conspiracy theories

On Twitter, however, an entirely new way of voicing conspiracy theories has emerged in recent years. The political scientists Russell Muirhead and Nancy L. Rosenblum call this, so the title of their book, "the new conspiracism," and identify Donald Trump as its major proponent. Whereas the old conspiracism depended on evidence, the new one, they argue, thrives on repetition. An accusation is repeated over and over again, but no attempt is made to prove it. What they overlook is that this is not a development that affects conspiracy theories in general, as they claim, but only on Twitter. It is the specific condition of the medium – most importantly, of course, the strict character limit – that affects the form that conspiracist allegations take. Muirhead and Rosenblum even speak of "conspiracy *without* the theory" (2, their italics), and for what is happening on Twitter this is right on point. However, on YouTube and in the many books that conspiracy theorists write even in the 21ˢᵗ century, the old style of conspiracy theorizing remains unchallenged. That things work differently on Twitter is a medium-specific difference that has a huge impact on the meaning of such accusations. It makes a difference if somebody provides evidence for their conspiracist claims, however weak it might be, or lets the accusations stand on their own.

the new conspiracism

But we do not even have to go to such extremes as conspiracy theories to see how the specific conditions of Twitter affect the content that is spread on it. Just think about the many times during the pandemic that tweets by politicians or scientists caused confusion or even irritation because they simplified or even twisted complex matters or scientific findings in order to comply with the workings of the medium. The politician Karl Lauterbach from the Social Democratic Party, who is now the German minister for health, had to repeatedly explain what his tweets were actually supposed to mean. The message is more than the medium, but the medium has a considerable impact on the message.

Discourse

Medium is certainly not the most difficult concept I discuss in this book. You were without doubt already aware, if only implicitly, of much of what I have said in the previous section. In this regard, then, medium could not be further removed from discourse, the concept we are turning to now. Discourse is arguably the concept my students struggle with the most. The reason why I put medium and discourse together in this chapter is that, as I said above already, they both operate on the same level. They are concerned with how systems of representation construct meaning. In fact, discourse is best understood as a specific theory of representation that shifts the focus from signs and the system of representation to questions of truth, knowledge, power, and historical change. Like the theory of representation introduced in chapter 1, Michel Foucault's theory of discourse, the only one of several existing theories of discourse that I will discuss here, is not that easy to grasp. Fortunately for us, Stuart Hall, who already helped us understand how representation works, has also written about discourse. Let's take things step by step with Hall as our guide.

Discourse, Hall writes, quoting Foucault, is "'a group of statements which provide a language for talking about – a way of representing knowledge about – a particular topic at a particular historical moment'" (Hall 29). Let's begin with the first part of this sentence which stresses that discourse is about "a group of statements." Hall later adds, in his own words, that "[t]he same discourse [...] will appear across a range of texts" (Hall 29). A single statement or text constructs meaning, but it cannot constitute a discourse. We need several statements (or texts) on the same topic to be able to speak of a discourse. What Foucault's theory of discourse is concerned with, then, is the construction of meaning across a large number of texts.

For example, everything that has been said and written on the coronavirus pandemic constitutes the discourse on the pandemic, just as everything that has been said and written about refugees constitutes the discourse on that topic. But we can also speak of discourse with regard to a specific time and place. This is what Foucault means by "particular historical moment," and this is what he, as a historian, was particularly interested in. For example, we could speak of the German discourse on refugees, or even the German discourse on refugees in 2015. Or we can single out a specific part of

Margin notes:

impact of the medium on the content

Foucault's theory of discourse

meaning across a large number of texts

the coronavirus pandemic

society and describe its discourse, for example, the scientific discourse on the pandemic, or the media discourse on it. And, of course, we can combine all of these qualifiers and speak of – and analyze – the German media discourse on refugees in 2015 or the U.S. scientific discourse on the pandemic in 2021.

In any case, discourse analysis is always concerned with a large number of texts, and this poses a methodological challenge to researchers. In the social sciences, where discourse analysis is also done, the analyses are often quantified and even done with the support of special software. Cultural Studies scholars don't work like this. Doing a proper discourse analysis thus means for them to really read a large number of texts on the same topic and to identify the underlying rules that they follow in representing their subject (I will explain what these rules are in a moment). Often, they don't do a proper discourse analysis but investigate instead how a specific text – or a small number of texts – participates in a specific discourse.

discourse analysis

So far, I have always spoken of texts (and I will continue to do so for the sake of convenience below). But this is not quite correct because, for Foucault, discourse is "not purely a 'linguistic' concept. It is about language and practice. It tries to overcome the traditional distinction between what one *says* (language) and what one *does* (practice)" (Hall 29; his italics). Voting for additional money for border control, setting up refugee camps in Northern Africa, or welcoming refugees at German train stations is as much part of the discourse on refugees as political speeches and media reports are. By the same token, the discourse on the pandemic also comprises discursive practices like wearing facemasks, self-testing at home, the establishment of vaccination centers, but also demonstrations against the restrictions imposed by the government, the forging of vaccination certificates, or the refusal to wear a facemask.

discursive practices

These discursive practices are all part of the discourse on the pandemic, but they belong to two different discursive formations, and it is these discursive formations that Foucault and those practicing discourse analysis in his steps are usually really interested in. (Indeed, very often, scholars say "discourse" when they actually mean "discursive formation.") The texts and practices that belong to the same discursive formation do not only have the same subject – for example, the pandemic or refugees – but also represent this subject in the same way. They do that because they follow the same rules. (If we want to ascribe agency to texts and practices for a moment, we could also say that they pursue the same agenda.) And it is usually the goal of a discourse analysis to bring to the fore these rules, as they determine the meanings that a specific discourse constructs.

discursive formations

The two discursive formations that have emerged over the course of the coronavirus pandemic are fairly easy to identify and describe. One holds that the pandemic is real and constitutes a great danger to people; the other holds that the pandemic isn't real, and that the real danger is that those who have staged it will take people's constitutional rights away. Of course, in Germany (and most other countries), the first discursive

formation proved far more powerful and influential than the second one. It can thus be considered the dominant discourse, whereas the second one only emerged in reaction to it, challenging its rules and assumptions. The second discourse therefore is a counter-discourse or, to be perfectly precise, a counter-discursive formation. However, "counter-discursive formation" is a term hardly ever used. In fact, most scholars even say "discourse" when they mean "discursive formation." That's why I will speak of "discourses" and not "discursive formations" from now on again, too, although I mean the latter.

There are, however, also cases where it is not really clear which discourse (or discursive formation) is dominant and which one is the counter-discourse (or counter-discursive formation). Think, for example, about the discourse on abortion in the United States. For decades, there have been two distinct discursive formations: one that regards abortion as a basic human right and thus as something that women should have safe and legal access to, and one that regards abortion as a crime or even a sin and that should therefore be extremely restricted (even in cases of rape or incest) or completely banned. In 1973 the U.S. Supreme Court ruled that every woman had the right to get an abortion before a certain point in the pregnancy. In 2022 the Supreme Court then overturned its earlier ruling. It did not say that abortion was illegal but left it to the individual states to decide. Over the next months, many Republican-ruled states passed laws that more or less made any abortion illegal. Democratic states, by contrast, and the federal government under President Biden have since been working to maintain the access to abortion. And over the past decades, a large majority of Americans has held the position that abortion should be legal under certain circumstances. What, then, in this case is the dominant discourse, and what is the counter-discourse? I don't know.

It is time to return to Hall's quote of Foucault. Discourses (or discursive formations), Foucault says, "'provide a language for talking about – a way of representing knowledge about – a particular topic'" (Hall 29). In other words, there are rules that govern discourses. And these rules determine what is sayable within a specific discourse. As Hall puts it, discourse "governs the way that a topic can be meaningfully talked about and reasoned" (29). For example, as I just said above, the idea that the pandemic wasn't real but staged could not be articulated within the dominant discourse. People who said anything like that (or that was understood in this sense) were heavily criticized and at times even sanctioned. They either had to apologize or clarify that there had been a misunderstanding, or they were excluded from this discourse. In the counter-discourse, it worked exactly the other way around.

But the implications of Foucault's theory of discourse are more far-reaching than the insight that there are actors who keep watch over what can be said within a given discourse. Discourse also regulates what is thinkable, not only what is sayable. It does not merely reflect ideas that exist independently of it, but it "constructs the topic" (Hall 29). In the dominant discourse on the pandemic, the pandemic exists. The idea that it doesn't can only be thought of as a false claim of the counter-discourse. By contrast,

Margin notes:

dominant discourse and counter-discourse

the discourse on abortion in the United States

rules that govern discourses

discourse regulates what is thinkable

in the counter-discourse, the pandemic does not exist. Here, in turn, the idea that it does can only be thought of as a false claim of the dominant discourse. (The very fact that I am referring here to the "pandemic" and not the "so-called pandemic" shows in which discourse I am participating.)

Unsurprisingly, then, what we found out about representation in the previous chapter also applies to discourse: Just as there is no meaning without representation, because meaning is constructed in the act of representation, "nothing which is meaningful exists *outside discourse*" (Hall 29; his italics). Like the theorists discussed in the previous chapter, Foucault does not deny that the material world exists, but he maintains that nothing in it has any meaning in itself. It only becomes meaningful within a discourse. A person coughing, two stripes on a Covid test, a newly developed vaccination, an obligation to wear a facemask, or the temporary closure of schools and other places mean certain things in the dominant discourse on the pandemic and very different things in the counter-discourse.

no meaning outside of discourse

Moreover, just as we can never escape representation and enjoy an immediate access to reality, as I highlighted in the previous chapter, we can never step outside of discourse, but only ever from one discourse into another one. There is no extra-discursive point that we can reach to objectively perceive what's "really" the case. This has a radical but entirely logical consequence that should not come as a surprise at this point in the book: There is no truth outside of discourse. Nothing is true as such, but only ever within a specific discourse. Just as there is no meaning without representation and different systems of representation lead to different meanings, there is not truth without discourse, and different discourses construct different truths.

no truth outside of discourse

This goes not only for opposing discourses on the same topic such as the pandemic that exist as dominant and counter-discourse at the same time. It also goes for what Foucault calls discursive shifts, that is, changes in the dominant discourse on a specific topic over time. A good example of such a shift is the transition from the one-sex model to the two-sex model, which the historian Thomas Laqueur has traced in his book *Making Sex* (1994). Laqueur demonstrates that for many centuries the dominant discourse held that there was only one sex. Men and women were considered to be essentially alike, the difference being that men's bodies possessed more heat, and therefore their genitals were on the outside, whereas the female ones were inside the body. But the vagina was considered to be exactly like a penis, and the ovaries like the testicles. Importantly, anatomists and others were not simply ignorant. They regularly cut open dead bodies for their studies, but what they found only confirmed their views. The bodies of men and women took on a particular meaning because of the rules of a specific discursive formation. It was only in the late 18th and early 19th century that this changed, and a discursive shift occurred. Very quickly, as Laqueur demonstrates, the two-sex model established itself, and men and women were now thought to be very different, and their sexual organs were no longer perceived as corresponding to each other. A new discourse had replaced the previous one.

discursive shifts

real effects
and conse-
quences

But just as meaning is not less real because it is constructed by representation, truth is not less real because it is constructed by discourse. It has real effects and consequences. We all experience this in our daily lives, but often are relatively unaware of it. However, we all became extremely aware of it during the pandemic, especially those who didn't think that there really was a pandemic. Like everybody else they were subjected to the restrictions and regulations that arose from the dominant discourse because this discourse was not only the dominant discourse in the sense that (at least in Germany) the majority of people participated in it. It was also dominant in the sense that those in positions of authority participated in it, and they had the power to impose restrictions and regulations on the population.

Foucault was very much aware of the fact that there are always some actors and institutions that have more power than others and that are thus in the position to influence or even control the discourses they participate in. In fact, over the course of time, the issue of power became central to his writings. Whereas his early studies focused on specific discourses – for example, on madness or punishment – and how different rules produced different truths at different historical moments, he later became more and more interested in how the construction of truth and knowledge – a concept he also increasingly focused on – is always tied up in relations of power. This was an important development.

relations of
power

For his investigations, Foucault developed a theory of power that has proven as important for scholars in Cultural Studies and many other fields as his theory of discourse because it differs from other theories and our commonsensical understanding of power in two important ways. First of all, Foucault argues that power "circulates. It is never monopolized by one centre" (Hall 34). This insight has two implications: Power is not restricted to any specific place and does not operate simply in a top-down manner, as popular accounts often imagine. Thus, there is no area of human life that is untouched by power relations. Power operates not only where we would expect it – in politics, the penal system, or at school – but extends to every part of our private lives, to our relationships, and even to the bedroom. (Indeed, Foucault developed this idea of power in a three-volume study on the history of sexuality). Moreover, nobody is completely without power. While some people have much more power than others, none of us – except for the most extreme situations maybe – is entirely without power.

power circu-
lates

The Chinese government imposed very strict restrictions on its citizens at the beginning of the pandemic and upheld them long after similar measures had been abandoned in the rest of the world. But when the protests by citizens got out of hand late in 2022, the government suddenly reversed its policy and terminated all restrictions within weeks. This shows that even the citizens in an authoritarian state are not entirely without power. My lectures on Cultural Studies – to give a very different example – have nothing to do with authoritarianism, I hope. But as in any classroom, power is also unequally distributed in mine. Clearly, I am the one with the most power: I design the syllabus, choose the readings, set the assignments, and give students a grade at the

nobody is
entirely wi-
thout power

end of the class. But I am not, as much as I might wish, all-powerful. Much of what I make students do is regulated by the module handbook or more informal agreements with colleagues who also teach the lecture. And while I have some leverage when it comes to what I teach and what not (as in this book), it's clear that there are certain topics one must address in an "Introduction to Cultural Studies" because of the discourse in the field. If I only talked about the beauty of tennis, I would run into trouble eventually. Moreover, I am not the only one who exerts power in the class. The tutors have power, and so do the students. They can use it to hush fellow students because they want to focus on my lecture. But they can also shape the lecture by providing feedback, nodding, or asking questions. In fact, they could even protest against the inclusion of a certain topic in the final exam. If there was massive resistance against being examined on Foucault's theory of power, I might give in eventually. In that, I am like the Chinese government.

Second, Foucault also breaks with the common understanding of power as merely repressive. He does not deny that power is often exerted to keep people from doing certain things – talking in class, driving through a red traffic light, killing people – but he stresses that power "is also *productive*" (Hall 34; his italics). It makes people talk about things, do things, produce things. During some stages of the pandemic, for example, we were of course prohibited to do many things – for example, travel, go to restaurants, or meet with a larger number of people. But at the same time, we were also made to do things that we had never done before: wear a facemask, get tested, and later get vaccinated against the new virus. (Getting vaccinated was of course not mandatory for most people, but we all were pushed towards it by the promise of certain privileges.) The dominant discourse on the pandemic also produced an incredible number of books, articles, and speeches, and the imposed restrictions led to the mass production of, among other things, facemasks, and test kits. Likewise, the students in my lecture have to read texts, they ask questions in class, discuss the topics of the lecture in their tutorials, and they have to take a written exam. They are thus quite productive because otherwise they won't receive credit for the class.

<div style="text-align: right">power is productive</div>

Foucault's theory of power has important implications for the construction of truth and knowledge. You are no doubt familiar with the popular saying that "Knowledge is power," which means that superior knowledge gives you an edge over other people. Foucault turns this proposition around and effectively argues that "Power is knowledge." Since power is all-pervasive, knowledge and truth are just as affected by it as anything else. And since power is productive, it also produces truth and knowledge. As Hall puts it, "Knowledge, linked to power, not only assumes the authority of 'the truth', but has the power to *make itself true*" (Hall 33; his italics). What he means by that is, quite simply, that a position of power allows an institution, a group of people, or an individual to define what counts as true and what doesn't.

<div style="text-align: right">"Power is knowledge"</div>

If this sounds weird and counterintuitive, consider the following example: Many students in my lecture are at least initially skeptical about the constructionist approach

to representation. Many are convinced over the course of the lecture, but not only by my arguments but also because as the instructor of the class I have the power to define what counts as the truth in this regard. Some students will reject the idea that meaning, knowledge, and truth are constructed until the very end. However, when I ask them in the final exam to evaluate the three theories of representation that I have also discussed in this book, they will, albeit grudgingly, write that the constructionist approach is superior to the others. They know that they will not score any points if they write something else, and they want to pass the exam and maybe even get a good grade. As a reader of this book, you are, compared to the students in the lecture, in a more powerful position. You can throw the book away and even complain to the publisher about the nonsense I have written. However, you will find the same argument in all other introductions to Cultural Studies. And if you want to do well in your Cultural Studies classes, you will have to embrace it as the truth. This is what Hall means when he writes that "All knowledge, once applied in the real world, has real effects, and in that sense at least, 'becomes true'" (Hall 33).

I could provide countless other examples to show how power produces truth. Just think, once more, of the pandemic and how scientists and institutions such as the World Health Organization, but also politicians and the media produced the truth about the pandemic and, in fact, the pandemic itself because of their powerful position in the emerging discourse on it. Or think about the United States and the so-called Culture Wars and attempts by Republican politicians to remove information about climate change, evolution, racism, or gender theory from the curricula of schools and even universities. The same goes for scientists, politicians, and journalists during the pandemic, and probably also for many Republican politicians that vote for banning certain topics from the curriculum. But in the end, individual intentions don't really matter for understanding discourses. What matters is that, as these examples show, the relationship between power on the one side and knowledge and truth on the other is pervasive and inescapable.

Let me quote Foucault directly for once to sum up what we have found out, and to introduce another important concept.

> The important thing here, I believe, is that truth isn't outside power, or lacking in power: contrary to a myth whose history and functions would repay further study, truth isn't the reward of free spirits, the child of protracted solitude, nor the privilege of those who have succeeded in liberating themselves. Truth is a thing of this world: it is produced only by virtue of multiple forms of constraint. And it induces regular effects of power. Each society has its regime of truth, its 'general politics' of truth: that is, the types of discourse which it accepts and makes function as true; the mechanisms and instances which enable one to distinguish true and false statements, the means by which each is sanctioned; the techniques and procedures accorded value in the acquisition of truth; the status of those who are charged with saying what counts as true. (Foucault 13)

'knowledge
becomes
true'

the truth
about the
pandemic

Truth is a
thing of this
world

I quoted Foucault at some length here to give you an idea of his style of reasoning. A lot could be said about this passage, and some of it would lead us far beyond the scope of an introduction. Thus, I will not go there, but restrict myself to the two most important phrases in this passage: "Truth is a thing of this world" and "regime of truth." The first phrase sums up nicely the idea that truth does not exist outside of discourse and that it changes from one discourse to another. The second phrase captures Foucault's entire argument about the role of power in the construction of knowledge and thus also truth in a nutshell. The term "regime" immediately evokes ideas of power and authority, and just as regimes can change, so can truth. It is thus never absolute, but always only the truth within a certain discourse.

regime of truth

One task for Cultural Studies scholars and those working in related disciplines can therefore be to investigate the regime of truth in a specific culture at a specific historical moment and to analyze how what counts as truth is produced in that culture. An exemplary study in this regard was undertaken by the anthropologist Bruno Latour, who I already referred to in the introduction, and the sociologist Steve Woolgar. In the late 1970s these two scholars conducted an ethnographic investigation of a neuroendocrinology laboratory in California. This means that they observed the scientists at work over a long period of time in order to understand what they were doing and to identify the rules of the discourse, in this case that of science, they were participating in. In western societies, scientists are in a privileged position to produce truth. One could even say that it's their job to produce truth. Of course, the naïve view of what scientists do is that they do not produce truth but discover it. But that's not true. Scientific findings depend as much on interpretation as those of the humanities and social sciences do. Drawing on Foucault's theories and their own close observations, Latour and Woolgar demonstrate that scientists do not simply detect the truth and not even facts, but that they produce them instead, following discursive practices that they learn during their scientific training and that can appear fairly arbitrary and even irrational to outsiders. Accordingly, their book is aptly called *Laboratory Life: The Social Construction of Scientific Facts* (1979).

The Social Construction of Scientific Facts

If you are having some tummy ache now, I feel you. Because the implications of Foucault's theories about discourse and the relationship between power and knowledge are far-reaching. If there is no truth outside of discourse, then there is no such thing as absolute truth and no neutral vantage point to evaluate competing and contradictory claims about the pandemic, climate change, or other controversial topics. Accordingly, there is also no continuous historical progress that gets us ever closer to the truth. From a Foucauldian perspective, the two-sex model which I discussed above is not truer than the one-sex model it replaced. Both were true within the discursive formation that produced them. I am using the past tense here intentionally because since 2018 a third sex is officially and legally recognized in Germany. There can only be progress within a specific discursive formation, but once a discursive shift occurs, the game begins anew. Both the dominant and the counter-discourse on the pandemic have progressed

the implications of Foucault's theories

over the past years, and on a much longer scale the same could be said about the more general scientific discourse that emerged with modernity. But if we take Foucault seriously, this scientific discourse does not constitute a progress over other forms of explaining the world that existed before (and may exist when or if it comes to an end).

Thus, from a Foucauldian position, we do not know more about the world or ourselves than a few hundred years ago. There is not really any progress. This sounds absurd, and I am sure that, like me, you would rather be treated by a doctor using modern medicine than by their medieval counterpart and their methods. But from the vantage point of view of Foucault's theories, which are very convincing and which, as we will see in later chapters, can be quite liberating, this is true, and it is something that I struggle with myself very often.

One way to deal with this is learning to live with and in fact embrace certain contradictions. The Foucauldian in me knows that there is no truth outside of discourse, the other part of me firmly believes in the superiority of science and modern medicine. After all, that we cannot step outside of discourse means that Foucault's analysis is also firmly rooted within a specific discourse, in this case a western scholarly discourse. Thus, its truth claim is only valid within that discourse. Moreover, my worldview, my truth, has of course been formed by the dominant discourses of my culture and thus by the scientific paradigm and its discourses. Unsurprisingly therefore, when I am not wearing my Foucauldian hat (and to a certain degree even then), I am a firm believer in science. That's who I am, and there is no reason why you shouldn't be one as well. It is definitely not my intention to turn you into sceptics of science. And thus, we have already reached the second stage of the circuit of culture: the topic of identity. Before we can explore it, however, there is a bit more to be said about representation.

Questions for Self-Study

1. Can you think of other differences between *The Hunger Games* novels and films that are due to the different media?
2. A few years ago, most of my students were on Facebook. Now they are all on Instagram. Compare these two media. How do their specific conditions shape the meaning of the content uploaded and the relationship between the person who posts and their friends or followers?
3. Apply Foucault's theory of power and especially his argument that power is knowledge to *The Hunger Games*. How does power "circulate" and how is it "productive" in the world of Panem? How are knowledge and truth constructed and maintained?
4. Think about the discourse on climate change in Germany since around 2018. Which discursive formations have emerged since then? Which rules govern these discourses? Which real, material effects have they produced?

5. Is the discourse of the *Querdenken* movement as right as the dominant discourse on the pandemic, according to Foucault?

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4 Genre and Narrative

We did it. We successfully tackled discourse. We are not yet quite done with representation, but I promise that things will get easier from now on. In this chapter, I discuss two concepts – genre and narrative – that operate, unlike the ones discussed before, below the system of representation. Both genre and narrative are transmedial concepts, which means that they occur in different media. What they have in common with discourse and medium is that they shape meaning. It makes a difference if I tell a story as a comedy or a tragedy (to use two very old and famous genres), or if my account of a poor woman marrying a rich man follows the model of the Cinderella or the gold-digger story (to use two different narrative templates).

transmedial concepts

In the first part of the chapter, I introduce the concept of genre. You are without doubt familiar with it already from studying literature at school. But genres exist beyond literature in the narrow sense. And, as we will see, they can have a huge impact on how texts (in the broader sense of fashion, food, and film as texts that I introduced in chapter 2) produce meaning, and also on how audiences approach and consume texts of all kinds. Much the same goes for the concept of narrative, which I discuss in the second section. This, too, is a concept that you are probably familiar with from school, and, once more, we will see that narratives do not only occur in novels, plays, and films, but also in places where you might not expect them. Moreover, over the past decades, more and more academic disciplines have recognized that constructing narratives is an important way for humans to make sense of the world. In that, they often follow preexisting narrative patterns, grafting their experiences onto culturally available templates. As a consequence, these patterns determine to a certain degree how humans perceive the world and their own lives.

Genre

Even if you have never actively thought about it, it's a safe bet that you have at least an intuitive understanding of what a genre is. You are no doubt familiar with, say, the genre of the novel and most probably also with many of its subgenres like the detective story, the thriller, or the romance. You also know that films come to you in different genres, ranging from romantic comedy via science fiction and fantasy to the buddy movie. The same goes for TV shows, and if you have subscribed to a streaming service (or several), you know that recommendations often come in categories such as "comedy," "unusual comedies," "action," or "adventure." This at least is how Netflix is trying to get me interested in new shows at this very moment. These and other labels raise certain expectations about the content, the style, and the effects of the stories thus advertised. You may consciously stay away from horror because you don't like getting

an intuitive understanding of genre

scared, while actively seeking for fantasy because you like immersing yourself into worlds where magic and supernatural beings "really" exist.

genre

According to, once again, the dictionary *Merriam Webster*, genre is "a category of artistic, musical, or literary composition characterized by a particular style, form, or content." This definition is good because it acknowledges that genre operates both on the level of content and on the level of form and style. A genre can be defined by a set of characters – for example, the princess, the dragon, and the knight – or by the setting – "A long time ago in a galaxy far, far away …" – , or by a specific use of camera angles, editing, and music – as in horror movies. Usually, it's all of these things together.

factual and fictional genres

However, the dictionary definition is problematic because it suggests that genres only exist in the realm of the arts: literature, music, film etc. This, however, is clearly wrong. Genres are an integral part of our daily lives. They exist in the realm of the factual just as much as in the realm of the fictional. Just think about recipes, assembly instructions, newspaper articles, or term papers. In fact, if you are a beginning student of English, you are currently not only learning to do Cultural Studies, but also how to master the gerne of the term paper. You are learning that some topics are acceptable for term papers in English and others are not, that you are expected to write a certain number of words in a certain style, to follow a certain structure, and to quote primary and secondary sources in a specific way. No single rule may be absolutely set in stone, but if you violate too many of them, your instructor might no longer accept your text as a term paper and give you a failing grade.

the term paper

Clearly, the specific rules and conventions of the term paper have an impact on the meaning of the text that you write. There are things that you can say in a term paper and things that you can't, and that's true of all genres. If you want, you can quickly skip back to the introduction of this book where I discuss what it means that this is a textbook for beginning students. I cover only certain topics and leave out others, and I do so in a specific style. If this was not a textbook for beginning students but a monograph written for other professors, I would do many things differently. That's because textbook and monograph are two different genres. The conventions of any genre thus have an impact on how meaning is produced in any text that "belongs" to this genre. (I've put "belongs" in quotations marks for reasons that I explain below.)

impact on how we approach texts

However, genre does not only influence how meaning is produced; it also has a considerable impact on how we approach all kinds of texts. Usually, we have a pretty good idea about the genre of a text before we start reading it, watching it, or listening to it – in short, before we start consuming it. That may be because you started watching a show that your streaming service has labeled "Fantasy," or because a pile of term papers has landed on my desk. In any case, our knowledge about genre automatically generates certain expectations. Even if the show you are watching begins in the Berlin of our world and not in Middle Earth or Westeros, you will look out for supernatural occurrences or be prepared for a sudden change of setting because you are watching a "fan-

tasy" show. And even if a specific term paper I start reading does not have a cover page, a table of contents and clearly identifiable sections as any term paper should have, I will still assume that it is a term paper and evaluate it accordingly. But if, in your show, nothing supernatural has happened by the end of episode 2 and the setting is still Berlin, you might decide that what you are watching is a thriller and not a fantasy show and your reception of it will change. Likewise, if I suddenly realize that what I am reading is not a bad term paper but a colleague's draft for a book review to be published in a scholarly journal that they would like me to comment on and that accidentally ended up in the pile of term papers, my reading of it will change because term papers and reviews are two very different genres with very different rules.

To sum up what I have said so far, let me quote at some length from John Frow's excellent book on genre. As you will see, he uses exactly the concepts we have been using:

> Genre, we might say, is a set of conventional and highly organised constraints on the production and interpretation of meaning. In using the word 'constraint' I don't mean to say that genre is simply a restriction. Rather, its structuring effects are productive of meaning; they shape and guide, in the way that a builder's form gives shape to a pour of concrete, or a sculptor's mould shapes and gives structure to its materials. Generic structure both enables and restricts meaning, and is a basic condition for meaning to take place. (Frow 10)

To my mind, the most important point that Frow makes here is that genres are not only restricting but also provide guidance. Just think back to the example of the term paper. Of course, having to write a term paper means that you have to do certain things in a certain way. But knowing what to do is also extremely helpful. The rules of genre guide us along. When you write a term paper, you know there needs to be an introduction and a conclusion, and you structure things accordingly and thus shape and, in fact, create your argument. And as a sometimes avid, sometimes reluctant reader of term papers, knowing the rules of the genre helps me approach and appreciate individual papers. I know what to expect and have criteria at hand to evaluate their quality.

genres restrict and guide

As I already pointed out above, genre functions like the different systems of representation discussed in the previous chapters because it shapes meaning, but it differs from them in that it operates at a lower level. A system of representation or medium like language or film comprises many genres. At the same time, genres cut across different systems of representation or media: A western can be a novel (that is, language), a film, a comic strip, or a musical. In this case, some elements – for example, the characters and the setting – will remain rather stable, whereas others – for example, the style and other formal elements – will change depending on which medium we are dealing with.

genres cut across different systems of representation or media

What's important to stress at this point is that genres do not exist independently of the texts that make up a genre. We must not imagine them like boxes that we cannot see but that are nevertheless there, even if not a single individual text has been put into them yet. Instead, we need to think of texts and genres as being in a dynamic relati-

genres do not exist independently of the texts that make up a genre

onship. In that sense, genres are abstractions that come into being if there is a certain amount of texts that share a certain number of characteristics. It is the lumping together of texts that are perceived as similar that creates the box in the first place. It isn't there before. Genres, then, are culturally constructed, and this has three implications. First, genres change over time; some develop, others disappear, and new ones emerge. Second, strictly speaking, it is wrong to say that a text "belongs" to a genre, as this would imply that the genre exists first and then texts come into existence that can be put in the box. That's why I put "belongs" in quotation marks above. It makes much more sense to say, as the philosopher Jacques Derrida has suggested, that a text "*participates*" in a genre (qtd. in Frow 25; Derrida's italics). Third, a text can participate in more than one genre: it can "belong" into more than one box at the same time.

generic hybridity

In fact, it is the rule rather than the exception that an individual text participates in more than one genre. In such cases, scholars speak of generic hybridity. (Hybridity in general is an important concept in Cultural Studies, and we will encounter it again in our discussions of identity and space.) Sometimes, different genres are of different importance at different points in the story. *From Dusk till Dawn* (1996), for example, a film written by Quentin Tarantino and directed by Robert Rodriguez, begins as an action film when two fugitive criminals kidnap a pastor and his two children and force them to drive them across the border into Mexico. Then, however, the genre changes dramatically as the employees of a nightclub where the group hides turn out to be vampires. In other cases, a text participates predominantly in one genre, but others have left their traces on it, nevertheless. The *Star Wars* spin-off *The Mandalorian* (2019-), a TV show, is a good example in this regard. The show's primary genre is science fiction, but elements of the western are palpable throughout. The protagonist travels from place to place and helps people in trouble, much like a classical western hero who rides into town out of nowhere to defend the innocent inhabitants. There is a lot of gun-fighting, and many episodes are set in desert-like places that recall the setting of western movies. And like the classical western heroes in films like *My Darling Clementine* (1946) or *Shane* (1953), the Mandalorian turns down all offers to stay once the fighting is over and moves on.

The Hunger Games

The Hunger Games also participates in different genres. Tellingly, the various genres are of differing importance in the novel and the film version of the first part. The novel participates in the genre of young adult fiction, which is aimed predominantly at teenagers and those slightly older. This genre comprises several subgenres, but most of them tell a coming-of-age story: They narrate how the central character, in this case Katniss Everdeen, manages the transition from childhood to adulthood and finds their place in the world. Virtually all young adult novels feature a first-person narrator to give their readers insights into the thoughts and feelings of the protagonist. *The Hunger Games* is no exception, as we saw in the previous section. But Katniss's process of growing up takes place in a dystopian future society, and the novel thus also participates in the genre of dystopian fiction. And, finally, the novel also is a satire

of TV reality shows like *Survivor* (2000-), which are clearly alluded to and satirically exaggerated in the cruel competition Katniss has to participate in.

Whereas the novel focuses mostly on Katniss's development, the film devotes most of its attention to the fighting in the arena. This is not only because external action is easier to represent in film than internal thoughts and feelings. The film also devotes much less attention to the love triangle at the center of the story, to Katniss being torn between two very different boys, her long-time friend Gale (Liam Hemsworth) and Peeta (Josh Hutcherson), who is the other tribute from District 12, although many relevant scenes from the book could be turned into film rather easily. The love story is of course not entirely absent from the film, but it is pushed to the margins in favor of fighting and action. Tellingly, this is particularly obvious in the trailers for the film, which can be found on YouTube. The focus there is even more on running, climbing, and fighting than in the movie thus advertised; the political background receives some attention, and the love story hardly figures. This shows that the motivation of the filmmakers to make a shift in the hierarchy of genres in the film adaptation is motivated by commercial considerations.

<div style="float:right">a shift in the hierarchy of genres</div>

I don't want to run ahead too much of what we will learn in later chapters, but, like many other cultural phenomena, genres are gendered, and so are, to a lesser degree, media. (Only think about the strong cultural association between computer games and teenage boys and young men, even though by now there appear to be nearly as many female gamers as male ones.) This means that many genres are associated with a predominantly female or male audience. The assumptions of producers often have some grounding in reality, but just as often they merely reflect problematic stereotypes. Boys and young men are seen to be more interested in action, whereas love stories and coming-of-age stories are perceived as primarily consumed by girls and young women. If we add to this that reading as such is seen as a rather feminine activity, while going to the cinema is perceived as a more masculine one (boys will pick the film, the myth goes, and girls will accompany them), it becomes clear why the film studio decided to put the action centerstage and downplay other genres that are central to the novel. And this, to repeat it once again, affects the meaning of the film. Genre matters.

<div style="float:right">genres are gendered</div>

Narrative

Narrative, as we will see, has much in common with genre. It also operates at a level below the systems of representation; it is also transmedial; and it also has an influence on the meaning. But what is narrative? According to most narratologists, that is, scholars of literature and culture that specialize in studying the forms and functions of narratives, a narrative is, at the most basic level, the representation of a sequence of events that are causally connected. "The king died, and the queen died of grief" (Forster 11), to use the classic example of the English novelist E. M. Forster, shows this perfectly: More than one thing happens in this little narrative, and the two things that happen are linked as cause and effect. None of this will be surprising to you. Even if you were

<div style="float:right">narrative</div>

not familiar with the term "narrative" until you started reading this chapter (which I doubt, given its ubiquity in media and politics in recent years), it is a safe bet that you nevertheless had at least some idea what "narrative" is, even if what I call narrative was stored in your mind as "story" or "plot."

Terms like "story" or "plot" and the fact that I have so far quoted a novelist and referred to scholars of literature might suggest that narratives are predominantly, and maybe even exclusively, found in the realm of fiction. And it is true of course that novels, plays, films, comic strips, TV shows, and even some genres of poetry tell stories and therefore are narratives. But just as genres exist in the realm of the factual, too, so do narratives. An autobiography and a diary entry are narratives, and so are the accounts of past events as we find them in history books. Newspaper articles are narratives just as much as the report a doctor writes after examining a patient. In other words, narratives are ubiquitous, and for several decades now, they have been studied not only by those interested in novels, films, and TV shows, but also by scholars from Psychology, Anthropology, Sociology, or Political Science. In analogy to the linguistic turn – the insight that many cultural phenomena function like language and can be studied accordingly – one therefore also speaks of a *narrative turn* in the humanities and social sciences.

An important insight of the narrative turn is what the psychologist Jerome Bruner has called "The Narrative Construction of Reality" in an important article. Bruner, and many others in his wake have convincingly argued that the world does not come to us in the form of narratives but that *the narrative construction of reality* is an important way for humans to make sense of the world and ascribe meaning to events. What we said about representation thus goes just for narrative as well. The meaning is not simply out there in the world and merely reflected by representation or narrative, but it is constructed in the process of representation, and constructing a narrative is one way of doing this.

Different narratives construct different meanings. To give an extreme example, it makes a huge difference if the current war between Ukraine and Russia is narrated as an unprovoked act of aggression by Russia against its neighbor, as the dominant narrative in Ukraine and the western world has it, or if the war is seen as a legitimate act of self-defense by Russia against NATO and especially the United States, as the dominant narrative in Russia but also many countries outside of the western world has it. The evaluation of who is "good" and who is "evil" changes completely. The narrative construction of reality occurs in all existing cultures around the world, but, as the example shows, it is very often *the specific historical cultural context* that determines how a specific series of events will be narrated and thus understood. The reason why, for example, many South American and African countries lean towards the Russian narrative of the war is rooted in these countries' experiences with western imperialism and colonialism in the past.

As the example also shows, narrative operates at the level of the individual text (in the broad sense discussed in the previous chapter) and as larger cultural narratives. Like genres, these cultural narratives do not exist independently of their concrete manifestations in individual texts. In a way, they are abstractions that we distill out of a large number of individual texts that follow the same pattern and thus tell – on one level at least – the same story. The two competing narratives about the war in Ukraine have been articulated in countless speeches by politicians, media reports, policy briefings, tweets, and a whole array of texts from other genres. Each of these individual examples is a narrative. At the same time, many of these texts tell the same story – either a story of unprovoked aggression or one of legitimate self-defense. We can therefore also use narrative as an overarching concept to describe what we find across a large number of different texts. We just need to make clear whether we are talking about an individual text as a narrative, or about a larger cultural narrative that manifests itself in many different texts. To borrow the terminology I used when I talked about genre, we could say that an individual text as narrative participates in a larger cultural narrative. And just as genres do not exist independently of the texts that participate in these genres, cultural narratives do not exist independently of the individual texts in which these narratives manifest themselves.

cultural narratives

Importantly, then, just as the specific system of representation determines the construction of meaning in the act of representation (because certain signs and thus certain processes of selection and combination are possible and others aren't), human beings are not entirely free in which narratives they choose to tell. They can only draw on the narrative templates, that is, the narrative patterns that are available in their culture to make sense of experiences and events. As should be rather obvious at this point in the book, which narrative templates are available in a culture at a given moment and which one is chosen, has a considerable impact on how reality and thus meaning are constructed.

narrative templates

Here are just three examples of narrative templates that are popular in the western world: from rags to riches, the Cinderella story, and – arguably more prominent in the U.S. than in Europe – the conversion narrative. I do not have the space to provide detailed explanations for all of these templates and will therefore only elaborate on one. You can google the others if you are not familiar with them already. The "from rags to riches" template is usually employed to make sense of why somebody who was poor became rich and successful. Importantly, this narrative pattern does not locate the reasons for a person's success and upward social mobility in factors beyond that person's control like luck, fate, or even divine intervention. Instead, the template highlights the hard work, diligence, and determination of the person, which in most stories that follow that template is still a man. As such, the template draws on and at the same time confirms a very western logic of individualism.

from rags to riches

People often fall back on certain narrative templates unconsciously because they are so deeply ingrained in their culture. In fact, they very often are not even aware of the

narratives are uncons-ciously and consciously constructed

fact that they are constructing a narrative about certain events or experiences, thinking that they are merely articulating the meaning inherent in them (just as we are usually unaware that we are constructing meaning and not merely transmitting it when we are using language and other systems of representation). But narratives can of course also be consciously constructed to achieve certain effects. The Russian narrative about the war is a case in point, as it is, as of this writing, reproduced daily by a vast propaganda machine (which, by the way does not mean that many of those who spread the narrative for propagandistic purposes do not genuinely believe it as well). As with discourses, there are certain narratives that each of us regards as reflecting the truth and others that we regard as false and fabricated. My use of the term "propaganda" thus clearly indicates which narrative I consider more appropriate in my daily life.

discourse and narra-tive

At this point you might wonder if discourse and narrative are not the same thing after all. But discourse is a much larger concept than narrative. As we saw in the previous chapter, it does not only comprise statements or texts but also practices. And not every statement is a narrative, and the same goes for images, maps, or other forms of representation that are nevertheless always part of one or more discourses. The two narratives about the war that I have outlined are important parts of two diametrically opposed discursive formations. Not less, but also not more. In Germany and throughout most of the western world, the dominant discourse is the one that sees Ukraine as the victim of an unprovoked aggression. The narrative that claims exactly this is a central element of this discourse but so are the delivery of weapons to Ukraine, the training of Ukrainian soldiers in western countries, the support of Ukrainian refugees, the omnipresence of Ukrainian flags in the public space, animated maps that show how the Ukrainian army has pushed back the Russian invaders and might make further advances, and countless others statements or texts that are not narratives in themselves. And the same could be said about the counter-discourse in the western world, which, in turn, is of course the dominant discourse in Russia and other regions of the world.

So, let's leave discourse aside and continue with our exploration of narrative. Another example of a carefully constructed narrative that has resonated with millions of people is Donald Trump's 2016 campaign slogan "Make America Great Again." In fact, what has made this slogan so effective is that it articulates a powerful narrative with a century-long tradition in American culture. It is what scholars call a jeremiad. Originally, the jeremiad was a religious narrative popular among the Puritan settlers of New England, a group of radical Protestant who emigrated from Europe to the American colonies in the 17th century. It was "designed to join social criticism to spiritual renewal," as Sacvan Bercovitch, one of the most important scholars of Puritanism has put it (xi). The Puritan settlers thought that god punished them by striking them with disease, enemy attacks, and internal conflicts whenever their religiosity declined, fewer people attended church, and more people sinned. However, the Puritans also believed that god's punishments "were *corrective*, not destructive" (Bercovitch 8; his italics). God did not want to annihilate them but make them mend their ways because he cared about

the jere-miad

them. Over the next centuries, this religious dimension was mostly lost. The new se-cular version of the jeremiad held that the United States occasionally needed a moral renewal to become again the greatest nation on Earth. This narrative exists until today, and Trump's campaign promised a staunchly conservative agenda and a new foreign policy to bring about this renewal and to return the country to what Trump and many Americans regard as its rightful place. This is why the narrative resonated with many Americans and won Trump, who also used the "from rags to riches" narrative to present himself as a successful businessman, the White House.

The strategic use of narratives also occurs in *The Hunger Games*, both in the novel and the film. When Peeta is interviewed on TV shortly before the Games begin, he reveals that he is in love with Katniss. The audience immediately grasps the tragedy of his situation. Since there can only be one survivor, Peeta cannot win Katniss's love in the arena. In order to survive, he will have to kill her; or he will have to sacrifice himself to help her survive. In any case, there is no future for the two of them. Thus, the story he tells is one of "star-crossed lovers" – a phrase from William Shakespeare's play *Romeo and Juliet* (1597), in which the two protagonists also do not have a future because their families are mortal enemies. Katniss is furious about Peeta's unexpected and un-wanted revelation because she does not know that he really loves her and thinks he only wants to score points with the audience at her expense. "He made me look weak," she complains, but Haymitch, their mentor, contradicts her: "He made you look desi-rable" (Collins 135). And he goes on to explain that the story of their tragic love will help them win sponsors, which are important to survive in the arena.

strategic use of narra-tives

The Capitol also promotes this narrative to generate more interest in the Games. After the Games have started, the Gamemakers even announce a new rule that there can now be two victors as long as they come from the same district. This gives the audience a reason to cheer even more for Katniss and Peeta. However, once they emerge as the sole survivors this rule is taken back again, because the Gamemakers would like to see them fight each other. But Katniss and Peeta threaten to kill themselves with poison berries. Here the story echoes once more *Romeo and Juliet*, whose protagonists commit suicide in the end because they cannot imagine living without each other. Unlike their Shakespearean counterparts, though, Katniss and Peeta get to live because the Capitol gives in, as it needs to give the audience a winner.

Romeo and Juliet

Their act of defiance, however, creates new problems for Peeta and especially Katniss, who was the driving force behind the suicide threat. The preparations for the obligatory victors' interview a few days after the Games and indeed the interview itself can be described as a struggle for narrative control. The Capitol tries to spin the story in a way that casts a negative light on Katniss (to prepare for her elimination later), whereas Katniss and her team try to push the narrative of the star-crossed lovers to present her as a lovesick girl who did not intend to defy the Capitol and merely followed her rather immature heart:

struggle for narrative control

Cinna comes in with what appears to be an unassuming yellow dress across his arms.

"Have you given up the whole 'girl on fire' thing?" I ask.

"You tell me," he says, and slips it over my head. I immediately notice the padding over my breasts, adding curves that hunger has stolen from my body. My hands go to my chest and I frown.

"I know," says Cinna before I can object. "But the Gamemakers wanted to alter you surgically. Haymitch had a huge fight with them over it. This was the compromise." He stops me before I can look at my reflection. "Wait, don't forget the shoes." Venia helps me into a pair of flat leather sandals and I turn to the mirror.

I am still the "girl on fire." The sheer fabric softly glows. Even the slight movement in the air sends a ripple up my body. By comparison, the chariot costume seems garish, the interview dress too contrived. In this dress, I give the illusion of wearing candlelight.

"What do you think?" asks Cinna.

"I think it's the best yet," I say. When I manage to pull my eyes away from the flickering fabric, I'm in for something of a shock. My hair's loose, held back by a simple hairband. The makeup rounds and fills out the sharp angles of my face. A clear polish coats my nails. The sleeveless dress is gathered at my ribs, not my waist, largely eliminating any help the padding would have given my figure. The hem falls just to my knees. Without heels, you can see my true stature. I look, very simply, like a girl. A young one. Fourteen at the most. Innocent. Harmless. (Collins 354-55)

The Capitol wants to tell the story of a political rebellion. It therefore wants to present Katniss as an adult who is responsible for her actions. (In addition, augmenting her breasts sexualizes her and casts her as dangerous, as I will discuss in more detail in chapter 6 where I address gender identity.) By contrast, Katniss's ally Cinna no longer wants to present her as "the girl on fire," that is, as an aggressive fighter. Now he wants to present her as more of a child than an adult. He has been ordered to pad her dress, but he has cut it in a way that counteracts this effect, making Katniss look more like a girl than a fully grown woman. He thus wants to help her present herself as "Innocent. Harmless," as somebody overcome by her emotions and completely unaware of the political implications of her suicide threat.

Before I move on to the next part, I would like to stress once more that we cannot avoid narrative. Of course, narratives can be constructed as conscious manipulation – to give a specific spin to events – as in the examples just discussed. But let me reiterate that narrative is an instrument of human cognition that we all constantly draw on, whether we want it or not. Just as there is no meaning without representation, there is no escaping narrative to make sense of any slightly more complex event. The widely accepted idea that the coronavirus pandemic was a great threat to all of us and needed to be contained by various measures is as much a narrative as the more marginal idea, promoted by conspiracy theorists, that the virus was harmless and used as a pretext by those in power to take away citizens' civil liberties. When there are competing narratives, as in this case or about the war in Ukraine, we usually consider one of them

more appropriate, correct, and even factual than the other. But this does not change the fact that both of them are narratives and as such construct meaning and do not merely reflect it.

Questions for Self-Study

1. Look at the promotional posters for *Isn't It Romantic* (2019), *The Haunting of Bly Manor* (2020) and *Star Wars: A New Hope* (1977). You can easily find them online. Which markers of genre can you detect? Based on the posters and the genre markers you identified, which narrative templates do you expect?
2. Watch the trailer for *Isn't It Romantic* via this link: https://youtu.be/G4O-X ZCmqcE. How does the trailer play with conventions from the romantic comedy genre? Why can the female protagonist (Rebel Wilson) not curse? And why can she not have sex with her love interest (Liam Hemsworth)?
3. Think of a narrative template that you have encountered either in your daily life or in some form of representation. How did it help to shape reality?

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5 Individual and Collective Identity

I said in the introduction that I am a cis, heterosexual, able-bodied, White, upper-middle class man, and that this influences my understanding of things. Back then, I provided this list to explain my specific positionality, the reason why I see certain things about Cultural Studies one way and not another. But I could also have said that this is my identity. Of course, this is not the complete me. I am also German, a husband, a father of two sons, a university professor, a resident of Tübingen, an avid consumer of movies and TV shows, a specialist on conspiracy theories, a passionate tennis player, and a card-carrying member of Bayern Munich. But even this list is not complete. I am forgetting certain things. (And there are others that I don't want to reveal. They are none of your business.) Identity is always contingent and never complete. We pick and link a few characteristics, which then become the markers of identity, our own or that of others. Selection and combination are thus not only crucial processes of representation, but also of identity formation.

markers of identity

The study of identity, of who we are individually and collectively, is a central concern of Cultural Studies. It is so central to the field that it could compete with representation about the position on top of the circuit of culture, which I introduced in chapter 1. It is no coincidence that Paul du Gay and his colleagues placed identity clockwise right next to representation when they developed that model. As a member of western culture, this is where you look next after you have looked at the top. The positioning thus captures that identity and representation are, as we will see, closely connected. Indeed, most work in Cultural Studies focuses on this connection. That's why I devote more space to these two concepts than to the other elements on the circuit of culture in this book.

identity as a central concern of Cultural Studies

If I devote slightly less space to identity than to representation, then only because the concept is less complicated to introduce, particularly because we have encountered – and, hopefully, digested – some of the major ideas that are important to its study in the chapters on representation already. Most importantly, as we will see, identity is on all levels – from the individual via the group and the nation to transnational communities – not simply a given but constructed. Our identity is not merely a reflection of some inner core or essence, but to a large degree produced by the culture around us and enacted in what we say and do. But just as we usually forget in our daily lives that meaning, truth, and knowledge are all constructed, we are most of the time – and some people, all of the time – unaware that our identities are also constructed. Just as meaning, truth, and knowledge are usually naturalized, as we saw, for example, in our discussion of the traffic lights, so are identities.

identity is constructed

In the first part of this chapter, I explain the basics about identity by focusing on individual identity. I elaborate on why and how it is constructed, how it is related to con-

cepts like discourse or narrative, and why representations are important for our identity formation. In the second and much shorter section, I then discuss collective identity. I introduce different forms of it and explain what's specific about its construction and effects. The chapter thus lays the foundation for our discussion of different identity categories and their interrelations in the next two chapters.

Individual Identity

The first letters that my two sons ever received, arriving just a few days after they were born, contained their tax identification numbers. This was no coincidence. Since the early modern period, when states as we know them today began to emerge, these states have been interested in knowing who their citizens are and fixing their identities, for example, as (potential) tax-payers. Our identity, then, is in parts externally produced. It is imposed on us from the outside. Through ID cards, passports, fingerprints, DNA analysis, and other mechanisms, we are individualized, and our identity is stabilized. My sons' tax ID numbers will remain the same until they die of old age, no matter how much and in which directions they will develop in the coming decades.

As Aleida Assmann, a scholar of English literature, whose chapter on identity in her introduction to Cultural Studies I quite like, points out, this external production and fixation of our identities is a double-edged sword. One the one hand, it "guarantees a degree of security as well as certain civil rights." For example, our ID cards or passports allow us to vote or enable us to travel when we present them at the polls, the airport, or the border control. On the other hand, fixing our identity from the outside can be a means of control and oppression (Assmann 191). At some point, the state expects my sons to pay taxes and wants to control that they pay the proper amount. And before I began writing this paragraph, I read a report online about a trans woman in Mississippi that wanted to attend her high school graduation ceremony in a dress because she identifies as a girl. (I address the topic of trans identities in chapter 7.) However, a court has now ruled that her school can oblige her to attend the event dressed as a boy. An identity that she rejects for herself is thus externally – and in this case, forcefully – imposed on her.

Identities are imposed on us from the outside not exclusively by the state. There are other powerful actors and organizations that have the power to define who we are, some of which are closely aligned with the state, while others are further removed from it. Take, for example, the American Heart Association (AHA), a nonprofit organization that funds research on and educates the public on cardiovascular diseases. It is not a state organization but since many acknowledged experts are part of it, the state and others usually follow its recommendations. In 2017, the AHA lowered the threshold for what counts as high blood pressure. As a consequence, 30 million Americans who had gone to bed the previous night healthy, because their blood pressure was seen as within the normal range, woke up sick, now suffering from high blood pressure. The lowering of the threshold thus had an impact on the individual identities of everybody

affected, while at the same time creating a collective identity for them by including them in the group of those suffering from high blood pressure. This shows how entangled individual – who we are for ourselves – and collective identity – the different groups that we are part of – are. It also shows that the external production of identity has palpable material consequences. If you are considered to be suffering from high blood pressure, your health insurance fee might rise, and your doctor, your spouse, or maybe even your mother may recommend you make changes to your lifestyle and eating habits.

palpable consequences

The lowering of the threshold for high blood pressure is an example of how discourses – a concept I introduced in chapter 3 – construct identities. Foucault, however, didn't like the term identity, he preferred to speak of subjects and specific subject positions. That's because the term "subject" carries the connotation of being "subjected to something" and thus evokes the link to power that was so important to Foucault. To speak of subjects thus highlights the workings of power in the external production of identities. Identities and their construction are always entangled in power relations. What is important to note, however, is that the medical discourse on blood pressure not only produces identities – or subject positions – for those who are considered a deviation from the norm and thus sick. It also produces the subject positions of the healthy as well as those of the experts who get to determine what counts as healthy and what doesn't.

subject positions

By the same token, the pandemic also produced a number of subject positions or identities. Just think of categories like healthy, recovered, infected, tested, or vaccinated. It turned waiters and others into gatekeepers because they suddenly had the power but also the obligation to check the status of guests since, for quite a while, only certain people – the recovered, the tested, and the vaccinated – were allowed to enter restaurants and other places. Privileges, restrictions, and obligations were thus tied to specific identities. Or think of the world of *The Hunger Games* where the Capitol imposes identities on the people in the districts. Not only are they second-class citizens, but from a certain age onward they are potential tributes, and their names are added to the yearly lottery referred to as the reaping. If their name is drawn, they are turned into tributes, and they have no power to resist the imposition of this identity and are transported to the Capitol to fight and most probably die in the Games.

identities produced by the pandemic

Beyond these rather concrete workings of power, it is of course the culture that we are part of that has a big influence on our identity. After all, as we saw in chapter 2, we are all born into a language, or, as in the case of my sons and many others, languages in the plural that make(s) us see the world in certain ways and provide(s) us with specific categories and concepts to make sense of ourselves and our experiences: "We all learn to see and feel and think from our culture in certain ways. We all acquire an internal identity from outside ourselves. What we are inside ourselves is shaped in part by what is outside of us" (Ryan 83).

culture influences identity

However, it would be a big mistake to assume that identity is only externally produced and imposed on us. As Foucault also highlighted, none of us is entirely without power and agency. In most cases – your name being drawn at the reaping is an exception – there are options that we can choose from. In some cases, we may not be aware of these options and may also be unconsciously choosing, but we are nevertheless choosing. In other cases, we are very much aware of our options and make our choices more consciously, often after extended reflection. Accordingly, then, our identity is not only externally but also internally produced. Often, there is a complex interplay between the two. When Katniss's volunteers to take her sister's place at the reaping, this may not be a conscious choice, as she feels that she cannot act otherwise and has no time to reflect on her decision, but it is still a choice – within the limited range of choices allowed by the Capitol. She voluntarily chooses one identity – that of tribute – over another – that of escapee this time and potential tribute again next year. And she spends the rest of the first part to escape the identity of the victim and to become a victor.

One way in which we produce our identity internally is by way of identification and disidentification. When the threshold for high blood pressure changes and this affects you, there are certain things you cannot influence, for example, your health insurance charging you more money. But you can identify with the idea that you are sick and internalize it, or you can reject it. If you do the former, you are more likely to change your diet; if you do the latter, you are rather unlikely to change it. By the same token, if there are two strips on your Covid test, you can identify as infected, or you can reject this imposition of identity, for example, if you believe that the disease does not really exist. If you do the former, you most probably isolate yourself in order not to spread the infection; if you do the latter, you probably just ignore the test results and take no precautionary measures. Importantly, there is no possibility of no identity. Even disidentification with an externally suggested or imposed identity always necessarily involves some sort of other identification. If you ignore your positive Covid test, you identify as what in Germany is called a Covid denier, somebody who does not believe that there really was a pandemic and who thinks that there is no dangerous disease caused by the coronavirus.

The identities constructed through identification and disidentification are often referred to as inclusive and exclusive identities respectively. An inclusive identity is characterized by conforming to rules and expectations. It is, in other words, the result of an act of opting in. By contrast, an exclusive identity is characterized by not conforming to rules and expectations. It is, in other words, the result of an act of opting out. Traditionally, cultures valued almost only inclusive identities, but with the advent of modernity exclusive identities have become more acceptable because they are often considered particularly authentic and individualistic. And modern cultures regard these values far more highly than traditional ones. However, there are limits to this acceptance of exclusive identities especially if they are perceived as threatening to the rest of society as during the pandemic.

identity as internally produced

identification and disidentification

inclusive and exclusive identities

We know from a lot of studies that Covid deniers and other conspiracy theorists often hold the beliefs they hold because this allows them to differentiate themselves from the majority of people. And differentiation is as important for identity construction as identification. There are two major ways of constructing our individual identity, and both revolve around establishing distinctions: We can either establish a difference between ourselves and others – by denying that the coronavirus exists or volunteering at the reaping – or between our current self and former versions of it.

None of this will be particularly surprising to you. I trust that you are well aware of the fact that we as individuals constantly compare ourselves to others and try to distinguish us from them to establish our identity. Teenagers set themselves apart from their parents and often rebel against them and their values openly, siblings compete with each other, students do things exactly as their teachers did not recommend, and so on. What goes for the construction of meaning, as discussed in chapter 2, thus also goes for the construction of identity: it hinges on difference – albeit, in this case not the difference between signs but the difference between self and other.

But just as we cannot opt out of identity completely, we cannot construct our identities out of thin air. We all have models that we emulate consciously or unconsciously. Teenagers may try to set themselves apart from their parents, but often they copy the styles and behaviors of their friends. Students may deliberately ignore what their teachers suggest but behave as they see others behave who they accept as their role models. Such role models, though, do not necessarily need to be living human beings. We are surrounded by images and stories of all kinds, and the characters that are represented in them can just as likely become models we emulate as living ones. Thus, representations matter greatly for the construction of identity. This is why parents and educators often worry so much about the films, novels, and games that children and adolescents watch, read, and play.

The second important way to construct our identity also depends on establishing a difference, but not between self and other, but between our current self and a past version. Comparing who we are now to who we were in the past (and maybe anticipating who we will be in the future) shows why narrative is an important mechanism of identity construction. In fact, we could twist Jerome Bruner's famous phrase a little bit and speak not only of the narrative construction of reality but of the narrative construction of identity. As psychologists and others have demonstrated in the past decades, we tend to spin autobiographical narratives about who we are and how we became that person all the time. Sometimes we just tell these stories to ourselves, sometimes we share them with others over a glass of wine or on Instagram, and sometimes we even write them down. On one level, we usually strive to preserve a certain degree of consistency, claiming that we are still the person we were ten or twenty years ago; on another level, however, we focus on how we have developed over time. As I explained in the previous chapter, we are not entirely free in how we construct narratives

differentiation

the difference between self and other

representations matter

the narrative construction of identity

but can only choose from the templates that are available in our culture. The same goes for how we tell our life stories. We have some agency, but it is not limitless.

Putting a spotlight on the narrative construction of identity also reveals that identity is a process. Narratives, to be sure, try to temporarily arrest this process by stating "I was once that person, but now I am this person." However, this is nothing more than a snapshot. Identity is, as I already highlighted at the beginning of this chapter, fluid and ever-changing. Our lives change and with it what's important to us and our self-understanding. We get married, divorced, have kids, and so on. Importantly, this does not directly affect our identity. What affects our identity is the meaning that we ascribe to these events and developments. Being a dad is an extremely important part of my identity but that's not necessarily true of all men who become fathers and in whose autobiographical narrations their fatherhood therefore might figure less prominently than in mine.

But not only what's important for our individual identity changes over time. What cultures more generally consider important aspects of somebody's identity changes over time and, of course, differs from culture to culture. Religion, for example, used to be an extremely important element of most people's identity throughout the western world. For some, it has retained this importance until today but for many other people it is now of little or no concern. By contrast, other categories like gender or class have generally remained important, whereas others like race and ethnicity have become more important since the Enlightenment. And yet others like sexual orientation or (dis)ability are now much more important than they were even a few decades ago.

Another aspect that has also become increasingly important to our identity constructions is consumption, which I discuss in detail in chapter 8. In many ways, we are what we consume, and we often consume certain goods and not others to express our identities. We buy certain cars, watches, phones, or clothes not only because we need to get around, want to know what time it is, wish to call others, or are ashamed or too cold to go naked but because these goods carry certain identity values. Even items that are at first entirely functional and that we do not even use voluntarily usually get customized in this way rather quickly. Most of us never wore a facemask before the pandemic, but already by the summer of 2020, when wearing them had become mandatory in most closed spaces, you could buy them, for example, in black or pink to go with the rest of your outfit or to express your gender identity.

When you put on certain clothes because they express who you are, you perform your identity. The idea that identity needs to be performed is one that I will discuss in more detail in the chapter on gender because it was developed by the philosopher Judith Butler with this specific identity category in mind. But I want to mention it here already because all identity categories and, in fact, identity in general are performed. During the pandemic, I performed the identity of a concerned citizen who takes the virus seriously by keeping a distance from most other people, wearing facemasks (I didn't

care about the color but admit that I avoided pink ones.), getting tested regularly, and finally vaccinated. Others performed their identity by not keeping distance, wearing facemasks sloppily if at all, and not getting tested and/or vaccinated.

The important point here is that performing an identity is much more than simply expressing it. Remember that our identity is not simply inside of us, as essentialism would have it, but that it is constructed. And performing an identity is a way of constructing it. I revealed above that I am a passionate Bayern Munich supporter. But my identity as a fan depends on me watching the games (I haven't attended one in more than twenty years because of superstition.), reading whatever I can get hold of about the team, talking to others about it, manipulating my sons into becoming Bayern fans as well, defending the team against criticism, but also criticizing it myself, and many other things. If I stopped doing all this for good or even for a while, I would no longer be a fan. My fandom does not just exist inside myself and is merely reflected by these acts but comes into being through them. That's why performance is central to the construction of identity. But more on that in the next chapter.

performing an identity is a way of constructing it

It's too early to tell if my sons will become Bayern Munich fans like their father. They might choose to disidentify to assert their independence of me at some point. (I pray that their inevitable teenage rebellion will take a different form.) But what is clear already is that for the foreseeable future they will have hybrid identities. As I revealed in a previous chapter, their mother is Russian-German, and they are growing up bilingually. What is more, they are very close to their maternal grandparents and thus constantly exposed not only to Russian language but also to its culture. Situated in two cultures at the same time, they are the norm rather than the exception. Just as genres – where we encountered the term hybridity for the first time – are rarely ever pure, so are identities.

hybrid identities

So far, my focus has been mostly on individual identity. I have touched on categories of collective identity only in so far as they are relevant for the construction of individual identity. A final point I want to make in this regard is that collective identities reduce the particularity of the individuals that are part of them. As a German, I am one of 82 million people; as a member of Bayern Munich, I am one of ca. 300,000 people. More importantly, as a member of these or other collectives only one aspect of my individual identity counts; the rest is meaningless for that identity. In the remainder of this chapter, my focus will be on some of the other specificities of collective identities and their construction.

collective identities reduce particularity

Collective Identity

Just as we construct our individual identities by distinguishing us from others, so do collectives construct their identities by distinguishing themselves from other collectives. The citizens of Tübingen think that they are different from those of Reutlingen; Swabians often want to have nothing to do with people from Baden; Germans think

they are better organized than Italians; Europeans consider themselves more cultured than Americans; and humans feel currently challenged by Artificial Intelligence. I am obviously exaggerating things here to make two points: First, the contrast of "us vs. them" is central to the construction of collective identities. Second, the distinctions between the group one belongs to and other groups are often exaggerated or completely invented in order to create the difference necessary for identity. This process is called othering.

Since I have so far used mostly contemporary examples, let's turn to Royall Tyler's play *The Contrast* from 1787 to demonstrate how othering works. The play was written and first performed at a time when the United States had become politically independent from Great Britain and was striving to become culturally independent as well. This proved to be a difficult task since the U.S. not only shared a common history with Britain but also the language. Moreover, all the genres that American writers had at their disposal stemmed from Britain. Tyler's *The Contrast* is an attempt to appropriate a typically British genre, the sentimental comedy, by using it to tell a story of the superiority of American culture and its people. The play revolves around the contrast between the genuine American Colonel Manly and Mr. Dimple, who is American by birth but has been corrupted by the time he has spent in England. Importantly, the play does not only make Manly the embodiment of superior political values, in particular the ideology of republicanism (don't worry what that is, though); it also casts him as morally much superior to Dimple, who represents Great Britain in the play. Manly cares about others, Dimple only about himself; Manly wants to get married for love, Dimple wants to marry for money and keep his pretty mistress on the side; Manly is honest, Dimple tries to deceive everybody; Manly wants to lead a simple life, Dimple wants luxury and wealth. In short, Manly is a good person, and Dimple is a bad one. And since the play is a comedy, Manly is rewarded at the end – he gets to marry for love – while Dimple is excluded from the fine New York society where the play is set.

In Tyler's *The Contrast*, the othering of the British for the purposes of constructing and celebrating an American identity is, because of the genre, ultimately done in a comic fashion. However, while collective identities are necessary and unavoidable, they often also carry the potential for conflict. The concept of othering helps understand why that is the case if we combine it with the concept of the binary opposition, which I introduced in chapter 1, using the example of nature and culture. What I did not say then is that the two elements of binary oppositions are rarely ever thought to be on the same level, to be equally valid. One is usually seen as superior to the other, and often vastly so. Applied to the construction of collective identities, this means that the desire to create and uphold a positive image of one's own group often goes hand in hand with a devaluing of other groups. (The same goes, of course, for constructions of individual identity but there it is usually less problematic.) Groups usually do not only believe that they are different from other groups, but also that they are superior to them when it comes to morals, skills, and other dimensions – just as Colonel Manly is cast as

superior to Mr. Dimple in every way in the play. This feeling of superiority can make them blind to the suffering of other groups, and it can legitimate discrimination, violence, and even genocide.

In *The Hunger Games*, the inhabitants of the Capitol feel very much superior to the people from the districts, whom they regard as uncivilized, ungrateful, dirty, and rebellious, and this justifies for them the oppression, exploitation, and even the ritualized killing of people from the districts. At the same time, the leaders of the Capitol are very much aware that the districts can pose a danger to the Capitol if they act together. The leaders therefore take great care to prevent the construction of a collective identity for the districts. The institution of the Hunger Games is an important element of this strategy, as it forces the tributes from the districts to fight each other, which turns their inhabitants against each other. One reason why Katniss is perceived as such a threat by Snow, the president of Panem, is that she disrupts this pattern and takes the first steps towards the creation of a collective district identity that considers the Capitol its other when she stages an elaborate burial for Rue, a little girl from District 11 with whom she forms an alliance and a friendship in the arena.

The Hunger Games

So far, I have treated all collective identities the same. But they come in all shapes and sizes. A football team of twenty players has a collective identity, and so do the citizens of Tübingen and the Bayern Munich fans around the world. Collective identities can be local (the citizens of Tübingen), regional (Swabians), national (Germans), continental (Europeans) and even global (humans). It is important to distinguish between two forms of collective identities. On the one hand, there are those where all that share the identity know each other personally or at least could know each other personally, as in a choir, a university seminar, a shared flat, or a tennis team. On the other, there are collective identities where there is no chance for those you share the identity with to know each other. I don't know all other citizens of Tübingen, all other Bayern Munich fans, or all other Germans.

two forms of collective identities

How do Bayern Munich supporters or Germans develop and maintain a collective identity? This question has been most thoroughly investigated with regard to national identity, but the findings of scholars can to a large degree be transferred to other large collective identities. The historian Benedict Anderson (1983) has famously described nations as "imagined communities." By "community" he means more or less what I mean by "collective identities." And he calls nations "imagined" communities for the very reason I discussed in the previous paragraph: "because the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion" (Anderson 6). This image, Anderson argues, is created through shared rituals, representations, and narratives. People sing the national anthem together; they don't have to work on a national holiday but listen to similar speeches by local politicians instead; they see their country, the space associated with the nation, clearly demarcated on maps; they par-

nations as "imagined communities"

ticipate in elections; and they know the narratives that either tell of the – often mythical – origins of the nation or highlight its allegedly specific characteristics.

As a historian interested in the origins of the modern nation-state, Anderson highlights the importance of print culture, the circulation of newspapers, magazines, and books in a shared language. But his ideas can be easily applied to the present and media such as radio, television, or the internet. Just think of a sports event like the Olympics. The athletes competing there represent their nations, and those watching at home often feel an allegiance to the athletes from their country and support them although they don't know them personally, often have never heard about them, and will forget about them soon afterwards. An event like the World Cup is arguably even more important for producing the nation because many people watch the games of their country in public, dress in the national colors and celebrate with complete strangers when their team scores. Before the game, the national anthems are played, and if one's national team does well, there is the general feeling that "we" won. It is exactly this "we" that is produced by watching the game and supporting one's team.

A far more sinister example of a ritualistic event that produces national identity is the institution of the Hunger Games in the fictional world of Panem. Everything – from the reaping to the interview with the winner(s) – is televised, and the people in the districts are obliged to watch. The main purpose of forcing them to witness the events is surely to subdue them, but it is also about creating a national identity. This becomes particularly explicit in the short propaganda film that is shown before the draw at the reaping. The film relates a one-sided narrative about why the Hunger Games were set up seven decades ago, presenting the Capitol as the caring and forgiving victim of the unfounded aggression of the districts. While the country of Panem obviously existed already before the districts rebelled, the film relates an origin story of how the nation in its current state came into being. "This is how we remember our past. This is how we safeguard our future" (00:13:34-40), the voice of President Snow (Donald Sutherland) declares at the end of the film, including the people in the districts in the collective "we" the film constructs, while also reminding them that they will always be second-class citizens of that nation.

The problem with many collective identities but especially with national identities is that they simplify and homogenize and that therefore certain histories and experiences are lost. This is particularly apparent in *The Hunger Games* where the whole point of the Games is to erase the districts' experience of the rebellion and to establish the Capitol's version as the only truth. But it occurs in every construction of national identity. In Tyler's *The Contrast*, for example, which is quite typical of how national identity was constructed in the United States in the years after the revolution, the experiences and specific histories of Blacks, Native Americans, and, to a slightly lesser degree, women do not matter. Instead, it is the White middle-class man who comes to represent the nation, its history, and its values.

Unsurprisingly, therefore, there is always a considerable number of people who decide to resist the pull of sweeping, externally produced national identities. They do not watch World Cup games, or support the teams playing against their national team, or express their disidentification in other ways. Especially in recent decades, there has been growing resistance to constructions of national and other forms of collective identity in which the experiences and histories of a few – usually of White men – come to stand universally for a much larger and far more diverse group. The insistence on the specific identities of oppressed and historically – in both the political and the semiotic sense (that I introduced in chapter 2) – underrepresented groups is known as identity politics and usually aligned with leftwing political positions. I will address it – and the right-wing backlash it has triggered in recent years – in the conclusion to this book. Now we turn to the major categories of identity at the heart of Cultural Studies and many other disciplines: gender, race, and class.

identity politics

Questions for Self-Study

1. Compile a list with the markers of your identity. Can you think of a moment where you resisted the imposition of an externally produced identity, and one where you embraced it?
2. Which narrative template does the novel *The Hunger Games* use to tell Katniss's life story and to make sense of her experiences?
3. Go online and watch a recording of Albert Hammond's song "The Free Electric Band" (1973). Then google the text. Apply everything that you have learned about individual identity to the song.
4. Think about the various ways in which your nation was "imagined" during the pandemic in the media, by politicians and in any other way you can think of.

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6 Gender, Race, and Class

Gender, race, and class are the three most important identity categories in Cultural Studies. They have even been called the holy trinity of the field. Historically, most work in Cultural Studies has focused on one or more of these concepts, with scholars often exploring the links to specific forms of representation. In recent years, other identity categories – such as age or disability – have gained in importance. Moreover, scholars have become increasingly aware that different identity categories are interconnected in their effects and therefore are better studied in combination. These developments are the subject of the next chapter. But before we are ready to complicate the picture, we have to establish the basics. This is why I discuss gender, race, and class one after the other in this chapter. I devote a section to each of these identity categories and introduce the most important theories and related concepts. In the section on gender, I also discuss sexuality. In the section on race, I explain why some scholars prefer the term "ethnicity" to race. And in the section on class, I highlight what the identity categories of gender, race, and class have in common and in which ways they operate differently.

the holy trinity of Cultural Studies

Gender and Sexuality

I take it that you are all somewhat familiar with the term "gender." After all, it's frequently used these days in the media but also in everyday discourse. Usually, gender is either linked to or distinguished from "sex" in such discussions. An important first step for us is therefore to understand what sex and gender mean and how they are related. "Sex" refers to biology, to chromosomes, hormones, and internal and external sexual organs. The German term for it is "biologisches Geschlecht." "Gender," by contrast, refers to what one would call in German "soziales Geschlecht." It concerns our behavior as men and women in our daily lives, both in private and in public. (I am aware that many of you already know that there are more genders than male and female, but let's keep things simple and binary for the time being. I will complicate the picture below and in the next chapter where I talk about queer identities.)

sex and gender

Simply put, there are two different theories about the relationship between sex and gender. One is essentialist, unconvincing, and has problematic implications. The other is constructionist, convincing, and can have liberating effects. Let's begin with the first one. According to this theory, sex determines gender. Or, as Sigmund Freud, the founder of psychoanalysis, once pointedly put it, "Anatomy is destiny" (274). What Freud and others who share his position mean is that our personality and our behavior are determined by our sex. If you have two X chromosomes, more estrogen and progesterone than testosterone, and a vulva, you will have a certain personality and behave in a certain way. If you have an X and a Y chromosome, more testosterone than other sexual

sex determines gender

hormones, and a penis, you will have a different personality and behave in a different way.

This theory may sound quite plausible at first sight. After all, who would want to deny that our hormones have an impact on our behavior. It also allows us to simplify things. The theory holds that there are only two sexes and thus also only two genders. In fact, as gender is determined by sex, there is no need for this category at all, its proponents hold. It's enough to talk about sex. But if we think about the theory a little bit more, we quickly realize that there is little evidence to back it up. If the theory was true, all women were more or less alike, and so were all men. There would not be any cultural or historical difference, since our anatomy, our hormones, and our genes are the same everywhere and haven't changed in the comparatively short time since human cultures emerged. In fact, there would be a natural way to behave for both women and men across time and space, and any other kind of behavior would be a deviation from the norm set by our bodies, from, in fact, a natural order of things.

Since women and men are essentially different, this theory holds, they are also meant to perform different roles in society. Women are, according to this theory, more gentle, kind, and caring, and thus predestined to care for children, the sick, and the old. But they are also seen as weak, irrational, and submissive and therefore in need of and, in fact, craving guidance and protection. By contrast, men are seen as rational and strong and thus made to perform the roles of protectors and providers and to occupy positions of power and authority. Of course, not every man can be a leader, but men in general are placed above women, according to this theory. Consequently, the two sexes are also associated with different spaces: the man with the public space of work and politics, the woman with the private space of the home. The man brings home the food (which the woman cooks). The logical consequence of this theory is a form of society which is characterized by the dominance of men over women. The scholarly term for such societies is patriarchy.

As you are no doubt well aware of, the idea that men are superior to women has historically proven quite powerful. Many past and present societies were and are patriarchal societies. In fact, even the contemporary western societies are patriarchal because women are still systematically disadvantaged in many areas of life despite several feminist movements over the past 200 years. But the idea that such an unjust order of society reflects a natural hierarchy of the sexes is wrong. For once, you should by now be very skeptical of claims that something is natural because you have learned that meaning is cultural, that it does not exist outside of representation and discourse. What is more, there are many examples of matriarchal societies in the past and the present: the Yoruba in Nigeria, the Mosuo in China, the Khasi tribe in India, the Minangkabau in Indonesia, and many more. Significantly, most matriarchal societies are found among Indigenous populations outside of Europe. While there are of course Indigenous patriarchal societies in all these regions as well, this shows that the domi-

a natural order of things

patriarchy

matriarchal societies

nance of patriarchy as the expense of all alternatives is very much a western pheno-
menon. Patriarchy is not the natural order of things but a cultural construct.

And so, indeed, is gender, as the second theory about the relationship between sex and
gender holds. This theory is far more convincing than the essentialist one. It claims
that gender is not determined by sex but culturally constructed. More specifically, this
theory comes in two different versions, but the overall claim is the same. According to
the first version, our biological make-up has absolutely no influence on our gender.
According to the second version, it has a little influence on it, but this influence is
negligible and definitely does not determine any specific gender roles or distinctive
forms of behavior. (As a father of two at times unruly boys, I lean towards the second.
Sometimes it's hard not to think of testosterone to explain some of their behavior.) But
what both versions agree on is that Freud was wrong: Anatomy is not destiny, and
therefore it is important to keep sex and gender apart. Rather, the French philosopher
Simone de Beauvoir was right when she wrote in her book *The Second Sex* (1949), "One
is not born, but rather becomes, a woman" (de Beauvoir 301). And we could add: One
is not born a man, but rather becomes a man. Gender roles are not naturally given but
culturally determined. One does not know how to be a woman or a man because it has
been inscribed in one's genes but has to learn what the culture into which one is born
considers (acceptable) feminine and masculine behavior.

gender is culturally constructed

One implication of the constructionist theory of gender is that we cannot speak of
natural feminine or masculine behavior or character traits. What we can do instead is
to speak of behaviors and traits that are considered typically feminine or masculine in
a specific culture at a given historical moment. Similarly, it does not really make sense
to speak of "men" and "women" since these terms tend to evoke essentialist ideas about
gender. Since sex does not determine gender, it makes much more sense to speak of
people who identify as male (and who may, biologically, be male or female) and people
who identify as female (and who may, biologically, be male or female). For the sake of
simplicity, however, I will continue to speak of men and women. But what's important
for you to note is that I am not referring to their biological make-up but to their social
roles.

typically fe-minine and masculine behavior

Another implication of the theory is that – from a certain perspective – it does not
make sense to speak of gender in the singular. Since gender is culturally constructed,
norms and roles vary greatly across time and space. And even at a specific historical
moment, there will always be more than one way to be a man or a woman available in
a specific culture. Scholars therefore speak of masculinities and femininities in the
plural; they investigate how these masculinities and femininities are constructed, how
and why some versions disappear and others emerge, and through which mechanisms
they are naturalized so that people forget that they are constructed and regard them
as the natural behavior of men and women.

masculini-ties and fe-mininities

the histori-
cal develop-
ment of
masculini-
ties and fe-
mininities

Research into the historical development of masculinities and femininities provides ample evidence that gender is constructed because ideas about both have changed considerably over time. During the late 18th century, for example, English gentlemen were supposed to experience and express emotions far more strongly and openly than in the centuries that followed. The protagonist of Henry Mackenzie's *The Man of Feeling* (1771), a novel that articulates the ideal of the sentimental man, breaks into tears several times throughout the narrative. When he finally confesses his love to the woman of his choice and they hold hands, which indicates that she loves him back, he is so over-come by his emotions that he dies. This version of masculinity might strike you as absurd, and it was much ridiculed in the 19th and 20th centuries when men were expected to be rather stoic and control their emotions. But think about how in recent years emotions have made a comeback in contemporary constructions of masculinity. In most western cultures, it is now again accepted and indeed expected of men to show emo-tions more openly.

Of course, there were men who didn't cry in public in the late 18th century, as there were men who did in the 19th century. It's important to remember that there exists always more than one version of masculinity (or femininity) in a given culture at a specific historical moment. However, there is usually one version that is considered ideal and thus superior to the other versions. R. W. Connell calls this hegemonic mas-culinity, as far as masculinity is concerned; and by now critics also speak of hegemonic femininity. (I explain in chapter 9 where the term "hegemonic" originally comes from. For the time being think of it as meaning something like "dominant.") Importantly, very few men and women live up to these ideals, but they serve as a yardstick for what is considered properly masculine or feminine and what isn't.

hegemonic
masculinity
and hege-
monic femi-
ninity

Here's a nice description of what can be considered hegemonic femininity in contem-porary American culture:

> In upwardly mobile, middle-class American culture today, the woman on the pedestal is the woman who successfully juggles a career and a family, which means she looks great at the office and over the breakfast table, and she's never too tired after work to fix dinner, clean house, attend to all her children's needs, and please her husband in bed. (Tyson 91)

What this list shows is, on the one hand, how unattainable this ideal is for most women. And this goes indeed for all forms of hegemonic masculinity or femininity. They tend to make impossible demands that hardly anybody can live up to. On the other hand, the example shows that hegemonic femininity – and this is true for all forms of femininity and masculinity – is never only about gender. It is usually also about class – the woman in the example is from the middle class – and sexuality – the woman is heterosexual. I will therefore return to the idea of hegemonic femininity in the next chapter where I discuss the connections between and combined effects of different identity categories.

Let me continue here with an example of how gender roles are naturalized and inter-nalized. In other words, it's time to talk about George Clooney. Shortly after his wife

Amal had given birth to twins – a boy and a girl – in 2017, he described their personalities in an interview: "[Alexander] is a thug already. […] Literally, he just sits and eats. […] [Ella's] very elegant, and all eyes. She looks like Amal, thank god" (Rothman). What's important to keep in mind here is that Clooney is talking about three-month-old babies. At this point, babies do very little more than eat, sleep, pee, and poop. Still, Clooney ascribes qualities to them that are regarded as typically masculine and feminine, implying that being a thug or being elegant came naturally to them. Clearly, Clooney was projecting these characteristics onto his children at this early age. He saw what he expected to see. But such expectations can become a self-fulfilling prophecy when parents and others then encourage certain behaviors in small children and discourage others. Effectively, they thus produce the characteristics that they thought were there all along, which, in turn, naturalizes these characteristics. And since the children learn that this is how they are supposed to behave, they internalize these characteristics.

With this example we have already moved from establishing that gender is constructed onward to how it is constructed. As with identity in general, as discussed in the previous chapter, real-life role models and representations are important. Imagine a young girl who only ever encounters stories that suggest that a woman can never be entirely happy until a nice man marries her, and they have two kids, that the woman in these stories always has to wait passively for the man to find or even to rescue her, and that she has to be sexually attractive in a traditional way but should also be demure and not sexually aggressive. If parents and others don't provide the young girl with alternatives and don't problematize the representations, she will have a hard time escaping their pull and will likely emulate and internalize such behavior as properly feminine. Of course, this is an extreme and made-up example. Hardly anybody is – at least these days – surrounded by only one model of femininity and masculinity. But I am sure that you get my larger point. We are constrained by which forms of femininity and masculinity are available in our culture and how accepted they are – generally and by the people close and important to us. We have some agency but are not entirely free in how we perform gender.

real-life role models and representations

I already highlighted in the previous chapter that we perform our identity, and now the time has come to elaborate on this theory, because it was not developed with regard to identity in general but specifically for gender identity. Judith Butler, who developed this theory, writes: "Gender is in no way a stable identity or locus of agency from which various acts proceede [sic]; rather, it is an identity tenuously constituted in time – an identity constituted through a *stylized repetition of acts*" (519; Butler's italics). Butler often writes quite complicatedly but what she is saying here is, in a way, only what we have known for some time now. Remember what we said about the reflective approach to representation in chapter 2. It's flawed because meaning is not inherent in the things themselves but constructed by the systems of representation. In exactly the same way, our gender identity is not inside of us and then simply expressed by our behavior. It is

we perform our identity

the other way around. The way we behave, the way we perform gender (and other aspects of our identity) over and over again, creates our gender identity. But just as we tend to forget in everyday life that meaning is constructed, we forget that our gender identity only comes into being through our repeated performances of it.

Before we continue, I hasten to stress once more something that I also already said above. The term "performance" does not mean that we are entirely free in what gender identity we assume. While we do possess agency, there are also multiple constraints. There are the ways to perform gender that are available in our culture, and of course there is also what our culture and the people around us, whose opinions matter to us, consider acceptable gender behavior. Moreover, while there are moments at which we perform gender consciously and with certain effects in mind, we perform it most of the time unconsciously. And that goes for all of us, even those who are aware of the fact that gender is not naturally given but constructed through acts of performance.

Billy Wilder's comedy *Some Like It Hot* (1959) offers a wonderful example of how gender performances that begin as conscious acts of deception are internalized over time. Set in the 1920s, the film follows the musicians Joe (Tony Curtis) and Jerry (Jack Lemmon) who hide from gangsters chasing them by dressing up as women and joining an all-female band. Initially, the film exploits their cross-dressing mostly for comic effects, ridiculing, for example, their attempts to walk in heels. But as time passes Jerry begins to identify as a woman. He drops the name Geraldine, which constantly reminded him of his identity as Jerry, and begins to refer to himself as Daphne. And while he earlier had to tell himself repeatedly "I am a woman!" in order to perform his act, he later repeats "I am a man!" to remind himself of his "true" identity which he feels is slipping away. Moreover, he begins a relationship with another man and even gets engaged. One way of reading his character at the end of the film is that he is biologically of course still a man, but that his gender has now changed to female.

His friend Joe undergoes a similar development. While he never begins to identify as a woman, he adopts a different form of masculinity. Initially, he is characterized as a ruthless womanizer, who is only interested in his own pleasure and advantage and does not care about the women he leaves unhappy. Since he is interested in Sugar (Marilyn Monroe), one of the members of the band, he begins to play the role of the sensitive and intellectual man that Sugar is looking for. Initially, this is just a ploy to get her to sleep with him, but, as with Jerry/Daphne, he internalizes this softer form of masculinity over time. At the end, he has really become somebody who cares deeply for her.

Judith Butler and other scholars highlight the importance of the body to our gender performances. Once I have introduced the theory of performance in my lectures, I usually ask the students to stand up, look around, and study how their classmates perform gender. Once they focus on this, most students quickly realize that the way we dress, the accessories we wear, but also our gestures and movements are part of our gender performance. While there are of course a variety of styles and gender perfor-

multiple constraints on performance

Some Like It Hot

the body

mances available to my students these days, certain tendencies can nevertheless be identified. Even in a contemporary German university gender still largely functions quite traditionally, with the difference between men and women being the most important one. Usually, it is quite easy to identify who performs femininity and who performs masculinity. The women tend to wear tighter clothes that accentuate the body far more frequently than the men do; they also tend to display more skin, and very often still have rather long hair; they wear more accessories, nail polish, and make-up (something that can be observed only very rarely in the lecture on somebody who appears biologically male).

It is not at all surprising that, generally, the body is still more important for performances of femininity than masculinity. Historically, women have often been reduced to their bodies, while men were often seen to transcend their bodies and represent its other: the mind. However, bodies are manipulated and displayed by all genders to perform their identities. When I was a student hardly any of my classmates had a beard. These days, I have quite a few people with beards in my lectures. Given that students are now much younger when they enter university than my classmates and I were, it is surely a way of performing a grown-up form of masculinity. While the decision to grow a beard or not is a conscious one, a lot of my students – and, indeed, we all – use their bodies unconsciously. The men tend to occupy more space – you may have heard of the phenomenon of manspreading – and are less afraid to touch others. The women, by contrast, often occupy less space; many of them cross their legs when they sit down, even though they are wearing pants, and there are a variety of gestures that distinguish (most of the) men from (most of) the women, but that I find too hard to describe here.

the body and gender performance

Let me give you instead an example from outside the classroom that I quite like because it shows how what we might naively think of as a natural difference is in fact culturally constructed. In her article "Throwing Like a Girl," the philosopher Iris Marion Young demonstrates that differences in how men and women throw balls are not rooted in biology but in the different ways they have, from a very early age onward, learned to use their bodies. Specifically, Young shows how women have internalized the idea that they are less capable of physical activities such as throwing a ball and thus lack the confidence to do so although they are physically quite capable of it. I often think of this essay when I watch my two sons at football practice. They are so young that the differences between male and female bodies, which develop with puberty and which nobody would want to deny, do not yet matter. From the spot where I usually sit it is impossible to tell boys and girls – they are practicing together – apart because this is a generation of girls that trusts their bodies as much as the boys do, showing how culture and education shape the way we use our bodies.

Throwing Like a Girl

Let us return, then, to my classroom. None of the gendered behavior described above is natural. It is all learned but has often been completely naturalized. In fact, many cultures – and contemporary German culture is no exception – value the natural much higher than the artificial. However, when it comes to our clothes, our make-up, our

gestures, and how we groom our bodies, there is no natural. It is all artificial, but often we forget that it is because the ideal itself has been naturalized. Something that often helps in exposing the artificiality is to highlight how such ideals have developed over time, how, in other words, what a culture regards as natural changes. Here's just one example: For quite some time now, it is an ideal of femininity that the female body should be hairless or at least mostly hairless. It is therefore not that surprising that currently more than 80 percent of American women do not only shave their legs and armpits, but regularly remove some or all of their pubic hair (Hoffman). To many of the women, this appears, as researchers have found, not only more attractive but also more hygienic and thus completely natural. However, during the 19th century, American prostitutes apparently used beaver pelts as "vagina wigs." The prostitutes shaved off their pubic hair for hygienic reasons, but their customers preferred women with hair as more natural and desirable. Thus, not only what we consider natural is culturally constructed, but what we desire as well. This brings us to the topic of sexuality.

Sexuality could of course be discussed in the next chapter as an identity category on its own. All our identities are to a considerable degree defined by our sexuality. It used to be just something people did, but in recent decades it has transformed into what we are. I have chosen to address it here, though, because a culture's ideas about sexuality are usually very closely tied to its ideas about gender and the body. In fact, the essentialist theory about the relationship between sex and gender that I outlined above entails clear ideas about sexuality as well. According to this theory, the identities of men and women are determined by their sex, and they are not only completely different and made for different roles in society; but they also naturally desire each other. Thus, the theory promotes what Judith Butler has called heteronormativity, that is, the idea that heterosexuality is everybody's natural sexual orientation. But if it is considered normal and natural to be heterosexual, then, by implication, everyone who deviates from this norm is abnormal and thus inherently problematic.

At this point, it will not come as a surprise to you that the constructionist theory strongly opposes this claim. But before I consider the implications of the constructionist theory systematically, I would like to quickly make one more point that you may find harder to digest than the idea that gender is constructed but that follows logically from what we have learned about discourse in the previous chapter. According to Judith Butler, not only gender is constructed but biological sex is constructed as well. This claim strikes many people as absurd. After all, we all have a body, and not even Butler would deny that our bodies exist. However, as we saw in the previous chapter, nothing means anything outside of discourse. And this means in turn that sex and the body more generally have only those meanings that discourse, in this case scientific discourse, constructs. Concepts such as hormones or chromosomes are, in the final analysis, cultural concepts; they are part of a specific discourse about the body and do not exist independently from it.

the natural is culturally constructed

heteronormativity

biological sex is also constructed

Remember the shift from the one-sex to the two-sex model that I mentioned in chapter 3. In Germany, this model is by now officially obsolete because, prompted by the highest court in the country, the federal parliament passed a law in 2018 that introduced a third sex – "diverse" – for intersex people, that is, people whose biological sex could not clearly be identified as male or female. The new law reflects, on the one hand, a public discourse about identities, and, on the other, a changing scientific discourse, which holds that male and female bodies are not as different as the two-sex model assumed – there are no binary oppositions on the chromosome level – and stresses that everybody has male and female hormones. Thus, as scientific, political, medial, and other discourses about sex and gender changed, so did the truth about sex.

<div style="float:right">a third sex</div>

The constructionist theory of the relationship between sex and gender has far-reaching and liberating implications. Sometimes students approach me after the lecture on gender because they feel uncomfortable. They feel as if they should apologize for being cisgender, that is, for their gender corresponding to their biological sex, and being heterosexual. But that is not what the constructionist theory is about. Whereas the essentialist theory legitimates patriarchy, and thus the oppression of women, as well as heteronormativity, and thus the oppression of all other sexual orientations, the constructionist theory holds that a whole array of different identity positions is not only possible, but, more importantly, that these identities are all equal. It is not better to be a man than a woman, or the other way around; and it is not better to be heterosexual than, for example, homosexual or bisexual, or the other way around. Heterosexuality is still the norm in our culture, but it should only be the norm in the sense that other variations are statistically less frequent. It should not be considered more normal.

<div style="float:right">far-reaching and liberating implications</div>

Moreover, the constructionist theory allows us to see patriarchy for what it is: not a reflection of a natural gender order but the result of sexism and discriminatory structures that systematically devalue women. If women earn less money when they do the same jobs that men are doing, it is not because they are worse at their jobs, but because the quality of their work is often disregarded. It is also more accepted by society when men push for higher salaries because they are supposed to be aggressive, whereas women are supposed to be docile, and many men and women have internalized these gender expectations. And if jobs that are traditionally done by more women than men, such as nursing or childcare, pay much less than jobs traditionally preferred by men, then this is not because these jobs are easier or less valuable but because women's labor is systematically devalued in patriarchal societies.

<div style="float:right">sexism and discriminatory structures</div>

Last but definitely not least, since the constructionist theory holds that sex does not affect gender, it also promotes the acceptance of trans identities, that is, of people whose gender does not conform to their biological sex, for example, people who are biologically male but identify as female. It is therefore a good thing that the constructionist theory of gender has become more and more accepted in many western cultures (however, there has recently been a considerable backlash that I address in the conclusion

<div style="float:right">acceptance of trans identities</div>

to this book) and that individuals can now choose their gender identity more freely than a few decades ago.

Race and Ethnicity

"How It Feels to Be Colored Me"

One of the smartest texts ever written on race is without doubt Zora Neal Hurston's "How It Feels to Be Colored Me" (1928). In this short essay, the African-American writer describes "the very day that [she] became colored" (152). Obviously, she does not mean that the color of her skin spontaneously changed that day. What she means is that she became aware of being Black when she was sent from her almost exclusively Black town to a predominantly White one at the age of thirteen: "I was not Zora of Orange County anymore, I was now a little colored girl" (153). But she does not only become aware of her racial identity at that moment; she is also reduced to it by others. Her first name, the marker of her individuality, does not matter anymore. All that matters to the people around her is her race and her gender. Moreover, the adjective "little" implies that the White people look down on her, that they feel superior to her. The short text thus captures a number of important elements for the discussion of the identity category of race: It shows that racial meaning, just like all other meaning, depends on difference (in this case: White vs. Black) and context (the town Zora is in), that people are often reduced to their racial identities and thus become representative of "their" group, and that a hierarchy between the races is usually immediately established (after all, the contrast between Black and White is, on one level, just another binary opposition).

a few words about terminology

Before we continue and explore these and related issues systematically, let me say a few words about terminology. Hurston uses the term "colored" throughout her text because this was at the time a relatively neutral term that was used both by Blacks and others. Today, however, the term has a very strong derogatory connotation. That's why you should only ever use it in quotation marks to indicate that you are quoting a source that uses it but that you are not employing the term yourself. The same goes for the term "negro," which has undergone exactly the same shift in meaning. The correct terms to use are either "Black" or, if you are referring to Blacks whose ancestors were brought as slaves to the United States "African American." (Many disciplines and fields also capitalize such identity categories by now, which is why I have been doing this all along already.)

the essentialist theory of race

As with the relationship between sex and gender, there are, broadly speaking, two major ways to theorize race. One theory is essentialist and incorrect; the other is constructivist and very convincing. Let's begin, as usual, with the essentialist theory of race. This theory takes as its starting point the fact that there are external differences between human beings. There is nothing wrong about this yet. But the theory also assumes that these external differences indicate different inner cores, different essences, so to say. Moreover, these inner cores are then, in a final step, considered to be

determining a person's character traits and qualities, among other things, their intelligence and their morality.

In many ways, then, the essentialist theory of race functions exactly as the corresponding theory about sex and gender. That theory holds that there are exactly two sexes, that these sexes are absolutely different, that they have different character traits, are made for different roles in society, and that there is a clear hierarchy between them. By the same token, the essentialist theory of race holds that there are indeed different human races, that these races clearly differ from each other, that members of different races have different character traits, that they are made for different roles in society, and that there is a clear hierarchy between different races. And just as the essentialist theory of sex and gender thus legitimates patriarchy and the systematic oppression of women, the essentialist theory of race legitimates racism and systematic racial oppression.

racism and systematic racial oppression

In the western world, the essentialist theory of race has been used to explain the alleged superiority of White people over Black, Indigenous, and (other) People of Color (BIPoC) and to justify their discrimination, exploitation, enslavement, and murder. You are no doubt familiar with some of the visual representations of racial hierarchies that invariably put White people (and usually White men) at the top and then worked their way to the bottom where the Blacks were usually placed. Phrenology, now considered a pseudo-science but taken very seriously in the 19th and parts of the 20th centuries, linked the supposed intellectual and moral superiority of Whites to the form of their skulls, while pointing to alleged parallels between the skulls of Blacks and apes, thus suggesting that Blacks had in fact more in common with animals than with the highest developed humans and thus should be treated accordingly.

racial hierarchies

The essentialist theory of race remains influential because many people still believe that it is correct, but it has been completely discarded by now by both scholars from the humanities and social sciences, and natural scientists. These academics come from very different disciplines and employ very different methods, but they come to the same conclusion: Human races do not really exist; they are a cultural construct. The external differences between humans can be explained by the fact that the ancestors of these people lived (or still live) in different parts of the world and were to different degrees exposed to ultraviolet radiation. Importantly, these differences are only superficial; they do not indicate any internal differences, for example, on the level of genes. In fact, scientists have by now well established that there are no genetic differences between people usually considered to come from different races. While there are of course genetic differences between individuals, the variations are greater among people considered to be of the same race than between groups.

human races do not really exist

A document that sums up the contemporary scientific position on race very well is the "Jena Declaration" issued by the German Zoological Society in 2019. It is worth quoting it here at some length:

the "Jena Declaration"

Thought patterns of biologically based racism, such as the analogy to domestic animal breeds, have tempted people to assume that we have the same right to speak of 'human races'. This was often associated with the assumption that the similarity within a supposed human race was significantly greater than that between races, which made segregation possible – a regrettable fallacy in the case of human beings.

The division of people into races was and is first and foremost a social and political classification, followed and supported by an anthropological construct based on arbitrarily chosen characteristics such as hair and skin colour. This construct served – and still serves – to justify open and latent racism using supposed natural circumstances and thus to create a moral justification.

It was mostly through scientific research on genetic variation among and between human populations that the concept of race was finally exposed as a typological construct. Among humans, by far the largest share of genetic differences exists not between geographical populations, but within such groups. The greatest genetic variation is still in people on the African continent, where the roots and most of the branches of the human family tree are located. The people of East Africa and all non-Africans are gathered together on one of its branches. Therefore, people outside Africa are more closely related to people from East Africa, such as the Hadza, than the Hadza or Non-Africans are to people from South Africa, for example the Khoisan. From a phylogenetic point of view, all people are therefore Africans. In consequence, it is positively paradoxical to talk of 'the Africans' or 'the black Africans'. This is a relic of colonial ways of speaking and thinking, and, once again, it is a case of racism creating races. (German Zoological Society 3-4)

Let me pick up on the final sentence. Racism does not arise because of the existence of human races, but racism, that is, the discrimination of people as a group based on their outward appearance requires a justification, and that's why races were invented. That's the position of today's scientists, and it coincides with the position of Cultural Studies scholars. As John Storey, one of the leading figures in the field, puts it: "[R]acism [is] more about signification than about biology" (167). It is about making an arbitrary difference – that of skin color – meaningful in order to create races and a hierarchy among them.

Zora Neale Hurston, by the way, was perfectly aware of all this already when she wrote "How It Feels to Be Colored Me" nearly a hundred years ago. This is not only apparent in how she highlights the process of "becoming" Black. It is highlighted equally explicitly at the end of her short text. There, Hurston writes, "I feel like a brown bag of miscellany propped against a wall. Against a wall in company with other bags, white, red and yellow. Pour out the contents, and there is discovered a jumble of small things priceless and worthless" (155). The bags of different colors obviously stand for people of different races: Black, White, Native American, and Asian. But the differences between these races are only superficial; beneath the surface, they are all the same. The content of the bags is identical. This dramatizes nicely the modern take on race.

However, neither Hurston nor the authors of the "Jena Declaration" would deny that there are indeed differences between groups who live in different parts of the world or whose ancestors come from different regions or continents. But these differences are superficial and meaningless as far as outward appearance is concerned, and cultural as far as the rest is concerned. What distinguishes the East African Hadza, mentioned in the quote above, from the Eastern European Hungarians is not their genes but their culture: their customs, their rites, their heritage, their history, their language. Some scholars prefer the term ethnicity to indicate that the differences are located on this cultural level and not a matter of biology. I often collaborate with scholars from anthropology on projects, and they are sometimes a bit put off when I continue to speak of race. But I do this because in American Studies, my home discipline, and also in large parts of Cultural Studies, race is still the more widely used term. Of course, I and other scholars do not wish to imply that there is any biological foundation to race, but we continue to use the term because, for once, it is widely used in American and British culture anyway, and second, we think that it helps us to explore the links between the cultural construction of race and the harmful effects of racism.

ethnicity

Racism comes in many different guises, and it is a central concern of Cultural Studies to identify, analyze, and critique it. Much work in the field is concerned with racist representations, especially racist stereotypes in different media, genre, and discourses. I address this topic in detail in the next chapter because in such representations race usually "intersects" with other identity categories such as gender and class and I therefore need to introduce the concept of intersectionality first to discuss them properly. But I want to quickly address here already the representation of African Americans in Harriet Beecher Stowe's famous novel *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (1852). The book is one of the most influential novels ever written. It boosted the abolitionist movement, that is, the resistance to slavery, which still existed in the United States at the time, on moral grounds. The novel suggests that slavery is a great evil for which there can be no justification. It represents Black characters sympathetically and holds that there is no difference between Black and White as far as feelings and morality are concerned.

*racist repre-
sentations*

However, *Uncle Tom's Cabin* also maintains a clear racial hierarchy as far as the intellectual abilities of Black and White characters are concerned. It dramatizes again and again that Black characters are less intelligent than Whites and therefore require their guidance and support. Uncle Tom, the novel's eponymous hero (that is, the character after whom it is named) is a grown man, but despite years of teaching by his White masters he has never learned to read. Throughout the novel, he needs White children to read the bible to him. The other Black characters are depicted in the same fashion. The only exception are characters of mixed racial heritage. In the logic of the novel – and, indeed, the world of the 1850s – they nevertheless count as Black, but they are represented as more intelligent and possessing more agency than those characters that are "purely" black. This makes the novel's essentialist understanding of race particularly explicit.

*Uncle Tom's
Cabin*

From our perspective today, then, *Uncle Tom's Cabin* is a racist and thus a problematic text. That's why it has been banned from school libraries in some parts of the United States in recent decades. As a scholar of Cultural Studies, I find this wrong and in itself problematic. In our analysis of representations and practices we need to be critical, but we should also do what the famous literary critic Fredric Jameson advised many years ago: "Always historicize!" (9). We need to understand texts and practices in the context of their time – even or especially when dealing with tricky and emotionally laden topics like racist representations. And when Stowe was writing *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, it was virtually impossible to escape essentialist ideas about race. We need to point out how her novel undermined its own agenda in parts, but it's pointless to condemn it because it doesn't meet today's standards.

Racist representations often fuel individual racism. However, I will skip here the issue of individuals discriminating against BIPoCs because they disklike them, harbor prejudices against them, or even hate them because of what their race allegedly signifies about them. Such behavior is deplorable but not at the center of Cultural Studies. Instead, next to racist representations, Cultural Studies is more concerned with structural racism and its effects.

Structural or systemic racism operates on a level far beyond that of the individual. It is concerned with racist structures on the level of society, with how racism is inscribed into a society's fabric, with how its institutions (some scholars also speak of institutional or institutionalized racism), laws, and policies discriminate against certain groups of people on the basis of their race, while simultaneously privileging another group. The point of the concept of structural racism thus is that racist structures endure although many people are not individually racist. But as long as they do not actively work to counter the racist discrimination, it will endure.

A well-known example of structural racism is the situation of African Americans in the United States. Although slavery was abolished in the 1860s and the Civil Rights Movement of the 1960s officially ended all discrimination on the basis of race, Black Americans remain severely disadvantaged. Many of them live in poor neighborhoods with high crime rates and bad schools. Importantly, the crime rates are higher in these neighborhoods not because African Americans are more violent than other people. That's a racist stereotype. No, crime rates are higher because the poorer people are, the more likely they are to resort to illegal means, completely independent of their race. And the schools in these neighborhoods are often bad not because African Americans are less intelligent than, for example, White people but because there is less money available because people are poor. As a result, many African Americans who grow up in these neighborhoods will only receive a poor education. This, in turn, means that many of them will only have low-paying jobs later. They will not have a good health insurance, they will not be able to put money aside for when they retire, they may not be able to buy a house, and often end up living in a neighborhood such as the one where

Marginal notes:
Always historicize!

Individual racism

Structural or systemic racism

African Americans in the United States

they grew up in. Thus, their children face the same situation, and the vicious circle repeats itself.

Exceptional events such as the coronavirus pandemic bring this discrimination particularly pointedly to the fore. It is no coincidence that proportionally more Black than White Americans died from Covid. Blacks are more likely to have jobs that could not be done from the safety of home office; on average, they have less personal space available at home and thus could not isolate infected members of the household that well; they often have jobs from which one is quickly fired if one calls in sick and thus went to work infected and thus infected others; and they often have only bad or no health insurance and thus were more unlikely to seek medical help when they showed symptoms than White Americans. What is more, since Black parents had to continue to work outside of the house more frequently than their White counterparts, since Black households on average own fewer electronic devices than White ones, their children had more trouble to keep up during homeschooling when schools were closed, thus putting them at further disadvantage for the future.

<div style="float:right">the coronavirus pandemic</div>

The flipside of individual and structural racism, of the discrimination against certain people on the basis of their race, is the unearned advantage that another group enjoys on the basis of its race. In western cultures, it is usually White people who enjoy this advantage, and scholars have coined the term White privilege for it. Whereas many BIPoCs are acutely aware of the structural disadvantages they encounter because of their race, many White people are unaware of the advantages they enjoy both individually and as a group. Dominant discourses often downplay these effects, and cultural narratives highlight individual achievements instead of structural factors. In fact, the veiling of the structural advantages of Whites often is so effective that many White people still think that they don't have a race like Blacks or Indigenous people. They thus are unaware that Whiteness is as much constructed as Blackness. Since meaning hinges on difference, they can only think of themselves as White because others are perceived as not White.

<div style="float:right">White privilege</div>

Class

At the beginning of this chapter, I said that gender, race, and class are something like the holy trinity at the heart of Cultural Studies. Well, with regard to American Cultural Studies I need to qualify this claim a bit. Whereas class has always been of great interest to British Cultural Studies, it was for a long time – and to a certain degree still is – the poor relation of race and gender in American Cultural Studies. To a certain degree, this has to do with the fact that, because of the history of slavery and segregation, race was much earlier of central importance to American Cultural Studies than to its British counterpart. But it has also a lot to do with the claim, which was quite influential for a while, that it wasn't a relevant concept for understanding the United States, as American society was said to be fundamentally different from European ones. This claim,

class as an important concept

however, has long been discarded. Class is an important concept for understanding all stratified societies, that is, societies where there are certain groups – the different classes – that can be distinguished by what they own, earn, the jobs they do, and the power and influence they wield. The United States definitely is such a stratified society, and therefore the concept of class is as relevant for understanding the United States as for all other modern societies.

the Marxist origins of the concept

Another reason for American scholars' reluctance to embrace the concept of class may have been the Marxist origins of the concept. Historically, large parts of American society have been even more suspicious about Marxism and its close relations to socialism and communism than most other western societies. And class was first and influentially theorized by the German philosopher and economist Karl Marx in the 19th century. Marx saw history as a series of conflicts between different classes. With the advent of capitalism, the conflict plays out as the struggle between the ruling classes, who own the means of production, that is, the factories and the capital to run them, and the working classes, who sell their labor for wages. Marx predicted a revolution that would eventually do away with capitalism and lead to a classless society. Thus, there is a strong utopian dimension in his theory.

the base/ superstruc- ture model

Importantly, for Marx, class is a purely economic concept, that is, somebody's economic situation is the only factor that determines their class membership. In fact, Marx also argued that the economy determined all other aspects of society. The economy was for him the base, and everything else, including politics, media, or culture, was part of the superstructure shaped by the economy. Whereas the model of the circuit of culture that structures this book stresses various mutual influences, the base/superstructure model assumes that influence only goes one way. Since Cultural Studies holds that representations and identities matter, that they create meaning and shape society, this classical Marxist model, which sees them only as reflections of the economic conditions, is of limited use to the field. Cultural Studies scholars therefore often draw on other theorizations of class that I will turn to in a moment. However, Marx also coined another concept that has proven extremely influential in Cultural Studies: ideology.

ideology

In fact, ideology is such an important concept in Cultural Studies that I devote a whole chapter to it and to the closely related concept of hegemony later in the book. I will therefore only briefly discuss Marx's influential understanding of it here. For Marx, ideology is not simply a set of related ideas or a certain worldview, as later and more neutral definitions have it. Instead, ideology is for Marx a set of false claims that are spread by the ruling classes in order to pacify the working classes and keep them from revolting against their exploitation. Importantly, for Marx, ideology is not only a misperception of the world, but it is also possible to step outside of ideology and to see the world how it really is.

At this point in the book, you know that this is impossible. We cannot step outside of representation or discourse. The world does not have any meaning without them. Later

theories of ideology therefore hold that we can only ever step from one ideology into another. But Marx did not know about discourse theory or the constructionist approach to representation. As a child of the 19th century, he still thought that an unmediated, objective understanding of reality was possible. And in his theory of society, such an understanding – the working class becoming aware of its systematic exploitation – is the precondition for its uprising against the ruling class, which he saw as a historical inevitability. The working class has to shed its false consciousness, it has to stop being merely a class in itself and has to develop a genuine class consciousness and become a class for itself in order to begin a revolution.

ideology as false consciousness

Over the course of the 20th century, there have not only been different theorizations of ideology (discussed in chapter 9) but also of the underlying concept of class. Whereas some approaches continue to consider it a purely economic phenomenon, others have, often influenced by figures like Foucault, redefined class by focusing exclusively on what one could call its cultural dimension: its connection to identity, and the performances of class by members of different classes. At the most extreme, these approaches see class merely as a discursive construction. The understanding of class that I would like to propose instead treads a middle path. Class comprises both a structural and a cultural dimension. Since class comprises economic as well as "cultural, linguistic, and performative dimensions" (Lawson 15), theories developed with regard to other identity categories, such as the theory of performance, can be meaningfully applied to class. But exploitation and class conflict – the structural dimensions – are as important for an adequate understanding of the workings of class as the cultural dimensions of class consciousness and class identity: "Class analysis therefore needs to attend to both the economic processes of capital accumulation and to the practical and symbolic processes of class formation and class struggle" (Lawson 11). The challenge is to balance the economic and cultural dimensions in concrete analyses.

a structural and a cultural dimension

Maybe you are wondering right now if I have tacitly given up on the constructionist approach that I have assumed throughout this book. After all, what I have said in the last paragraph seems to imply that class is only partly constructed and partly real. In any case, it seems to be somehow realer than gender and race. Well, remember that throughout this book I have also stressed that the fact that something is constructed does not mean that it does not have real effects. This goes for the meaning of the traffic lights discussed in chapter 2 as much as for racism as a consequence of the construction of race, as discussed in the previous section. In that sense, the structural or economic dimension of class is also the result of a construction, but this construction occurs earlier. It is, if you will, located at a deeper level. That some people have more money than others is due to the value that cultures ascribe to certain types of work and certain goods that are traded. The worth of money, so to say, is a complete cultural construction, but its effects are real, and the economic dimension of class is one of them. At the end of the day, some people have more money than others.

class vs. race and gender

The French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu has proposed a theory that balances the economic and cultural dimensions of class very well and is as useful for analyzing manifestations of class in real life as in representations of all kinds. Bourdieu distinguishes between three different kinds of capital: economic capital, cultural capital, and social capital. Economic capital is what Marx had in mind when he first defined capital. It comprises money, property, and other assets. Cultural capital is somebody's level of education, their competence in the codes of their culture, but also their command of language, or their style. Social capital refers to a person's network, their connections and acquaintances. Bourdieu argues that somebody's class position depends on the combination of these three forms of capital. His approach therefore acknowledges the importance of "softer" factors like somebody's appearance and behavior for their class identity without neglecting the "hard" economic ones.

Take me for example. I would describe my class position as upper middle class. While I earn far above average as an employee of the state, my income alone would not justify this positioning since there is a considerable number of people who earn more without yet being really rich themselves. But my cultural and social capital is much higher than my economic one. I have four university degrees, and I am a tenured professor, and since I have spent my life reading, watching movies, or studying paintings and photographs, people assume that I have meaningful things to say about art. I have studied in England and the Unites States, have been invited to some of the most prestigious universities in the world, and – mostly because of my work on conspiracy theory – I have been interviewed by television, radio, and newspapers in many different countries. Therefore, I know a lot of people in the media and politics. My social capital is thus also considerable. Taken together, these factors determine my class membership.

One of the advantages of Bourdieu's distinction between different forms of capital is that it helps us understand why people who command roughly the same economic capital nevertheless belong to different classes, or why sometimes people who possess more economic capital are nevertheless positioned below some people who possess less capital of that sort in a society's class system. Consider, for example, the following passage from F. Scott Fitzgerald's novel *The Great Gatsby* (1925). It focuses on Jay Gatsby's attempt to win over Daisy Buchanan, with whom he fell in love when he was still very young and poor. Daisy comes from a family that has been rich for many generations and represents "old money." She is married to Tom Buchanan, who also comes from a rich family and feels threatened by Gatsby, who is by now very rich himself:

> Gatsby's foot beat a short, restless tattoo and Tom eyed him suddenly.
> "By the way, Mr. Gatsby, I understand you're an Oxford man."
> "Not exactly."
> "Oh, yes, I understand you went to Oxford."
> "Yes – I went there."

three different kinds of capital

my class position

The Great Gatsby

A pause. [...] A waiter knocked and came in with crushed mint and ice but the silence was unbroken by his "Thank you" and the soft closing of the door. This tremendous detail was to be cleared up at last.

"I told you I went there," said Gatsby.

"I heard you, but I'd like to know when."

"It was in nineteen-nineteen, I only stayed five months. That's why I can't really call myself an Oxford man."

Tom glanced around to see if we mirrored his unbelief. But we were all looking at Gatsby.

"It was an opportunity they gave to some of the officers after the Armistice [at the end of World War I]," he continued. "We could go to any of the universities in England or France."

I wanted to get up and slap him on the back. I had one of those renewals of complete faith in him that I'd experienced before.

Daisy rose, smiling faintly, and went to the table.

"Open the whiskey, Tom," she ordered. "And I'll make you a mint julep. Then you won't seem so stupid to yourself...Look at the mint!"

"Wait a minute," snapped Tom, "I want to ask Mr. Gatsby one more question."

"Go on," Gatsby said politely.

"What kind of a row are you trying to cause in my house anyhow?"

They were out in the open at last and Gatsby was content.

"He isn't causing a row." Daisy looked desperately from one to the other. "You're causing a row. Please have a little self control."

"Self control!" repeated Tom incredulously. "I suppose the latest thing is to sit back and let Mr. Nobody from Nowhere make love to your wife. Well, if that's the idea you can count me out ... Nowadays people begin by sneering at family life and family institutions and next they'll throw everything overboard and have intermarriage between black and white."

Flushed with his impassioned gibberish he saw himself standing alone on the last barrier of civilization.

"We're all white here," murmured Jordan. (Fitzgerald 122-24)

Tom has been to one of Gatsby's famous parties and thus knows that his rival possesses considerable economic capital. In order to disqualify him, he therefore tries to establish his own superiority in terms of cultural and social capital. His aggressive questioning of Gatsby brings to the fore that the latter has been to Oxford, one of the most prestigious universities in the world, but that he was not admitted as a regular student, that he only spent five months there, and did not graduate from the institution. Tom takes what he learns as evidence that Gatsby cannot compete with him in terms of cultural capital. After all, Tom has graduated from Yale. The other people present, however, take a different position. Nick, Gatsby's neighbor and the narrator of the story, is happy that Gatsby went to Oxford at all; and Daisy tries to calm Tom down and change the subject. This, however, enrages him even further, and he reacts by stressing that he commands considerably more social capital. This is why he calls Gatsby "Mr. Nobody from Nowhere."

"Mr. Nobody from Now-here"

Significantly, at the end of the passage Tom performs an extreme act of othering by casting Gatsby as Black. Like many of his contemporaries, Tom has an essentialist understanding of race; and, like many of them, he is an extreme racist and concerned that the "White race" might lose its supremacy. By suggesting that a marriage between Daisy and Gatsby would be like an interracial marriage, something absolutely frowned upon by society and forbidden by law in many American states at the time, he essentializes class membership, suggesting that it is not merely a matter of different forms of capital but something that one is born with and into.

The Great Gatsby is a novel that thoroughly exposes the workings of class and also the almost impossible task to overcome class boundaries. Many other texts of all kinds, especially American ones, however, downplay the constraints that class puts on individuals, thus often confirming the idea that the United States is a classless society where success is entirely a matter of one's individual skills and determinations. I would like to demonstrate how such narratives work by addressing in some detail *Working Girl*, a romantic comedy directed by Mike Nichols. It was one of the most successful films of 1988 and received several Academy Award nominations. Significantly, the film ties class mobility to very conservative ideas about gender. It shows women as successful professionals but only rewards the one that defers to patriarchal authority and punishes the one that tries to manipulate men sexually and otherwise. More generally, the film thus shows what I address systematically in the next chapter: that different identity categories usually intersect – both in real life and in cultural representations.

Working Girl is set in New York City's Financial District and tells the story of how Tess McGill (Melanie Griffith), a secretary in a Wall Street investment bank, manages to become a stockbroker herself. At the end of the film, Tess has not only secured a prestigious job with Trask Industries and triumphed over her scheming boss Katharine (Sigourney Weaver), who pretended to support her but then stole one of her ideas; she has also won the heart of Jack Trainer (Harrison Ford), an investment banker with another firm and Katharine's former boyfriend. *Working Girl*, then, tells a typical "from rags to riches" narrative that suggests that in the United States individual success and upward mobility are possible for everybody who pursues them with the proper dedication. The film thus confirms the powerful cultural myth of the American Dream.

Tess McGill starts out as a secretary, but she ends up heading a department in a prestigious Wall Street company because she has "a real fire in [her] belly," as Oren Trask (Philip Bosco), the film's ultimate embodiment of authority, puts it at the moment of her eventual triumph. Throughout the film, Tess pursues her dream unwaveringly. She bends the rules by assuming the identity of a stockbroker to do the deal that Katharine tried to cheat her out of, but the film legitimizes this by highlighting repeatedly how she remains fundamentally honest and good at heart. Significantly, the film aligns her success story with visual markers that evoke the traditional notion of the United States as a land of opportunity for immigrants. The film begins with a shot of the Statue of Liberty before it focuses on the ferry that Tess takes each morning to commute from

Staten Island to her work in the Financial District. She is thus from the very beginning cast as a metaphorical immigrant who comes to America in search of a better life. Fittingly, at the end of the film she is sharing an apartment with Jack in Manhattan. The immigrant has successfully established herself.

a metaphorical immigrant

The ease with which Tess assumes the markers of an upper-class identity contributes to making class boundaries appear permeable. While Tess is, by way of her accent and intonation, her clothes, her make-up, and the way she does her hair, clearly cast as member of the working class in the beginning of the film, this changes quickly once she pretends to be a businesswoman. This requires some training on her part, as a scene shows in which she works out on an exercise bike in Katherine's apartment listening to a letter her boss recorded for dictation and trying to copy her diction and intonation. Overall, however, she adopts the upper-class behavior rather effortlessly. The film implies that cultural capital – in this case, a certain style – is easily acquired. The same is suggested about social capital, the connections to Trainer and Trask, which Tess establishes not quite honestly but rather effortlessly. The film thus downplays the fact that class markers are internalized forms of behavior that are difficult to change, suggesting instead that all that distinguishes the rich from the poor is the amount of money they have, that is, the economic capital, and the types of clothes and make-up they wear. Tess's success also proves her friend Cynthia (Joan Cusack) wrong. When Katharine nearly finds out about Tess's scheme, Cynthia tells Tess: "Sometimes I sing and dance around the house in my underwear. It doesn't make me Madonna. Never will." Instead, as Tess starts wearing the clothes of an upper-class businesswoman, she starts becoming one, suggesting that class is quite easily performed.

class boundaries appear permeable

Another important element of the film's narrative is that formal education and elite knowledge, further elements of cultural capital, are not necessary for a successful career. *Working Girl* suggests that Tess succeeds because she possesses common sense and develops her business strategies based on sources that others, especially Katherine, do not take seriously. The idea that Trask Industries should buy a radio station – the idea that eventually makes her career – comes to Tess while reading both the business and the celebrity pages of a popular newspaper. Trask's lawyers initially reject the idea because they are set on buying a TV station, but CEO Oren Trask intervenes because he immediately recognizes the potential. In this scene as well as in several others, Tess is aligned with Trask, which implies that her mind for business equals his. Unsurprisingly, therefore, it is Trask who finally decides to listen to her after she has been found out by Katherine and fired from her job. His instincts tell him to get into a lift with Tess and not with Katherine, and on the ride up to Katherine's office Tess alerts him to the weakness in the business scheme that she herself became aware of while reading a gossip column.

common sense

It is no coincidence that Trask is the final arbiter of Tess's fate, and it is equally important that the happy ending only comes about because Trainer takes her side in the final confrontation with Katherine. The film suggests that the system – both the busi-

ness world and society at large – are ultimately fair, and that people like Katharine or Tess's former boss, who tried to set her up with a sleazy colleague, are simply corrupt individuals. However, success in this world is ultimately only available for women who play by the rules, defer to male authority, and do not use their sexuality to get ahead. Katherine does not play by these rules and thus is duly punished at the end. Not only does she steal Tess's idea; throughout the film, she is also repeatedly shown using her looks to get what she wants, and she obviously possesses loose sexual mores. During her time in the hospital, she wears a see-through negligée and flirts with the male doctors, after her return she aggressively tries to seduce Trainer and conflates business and sexuality when she tells him that they should "merge," and when she breaks into the meeting and exposes Tess, she pretends to faint to gather the men's sympathy. Almost logically, therefore, when she is found out, she is not only fired but also body-shamed. Picking up a phrase Tess used earlier, Trask tells Katharine to "get her bony ass out of [his] sight."

Tess, by contrast, may possess "[a] brain for business and a body for sin," as she tells Trainer over drinks when they first meet, but the film casts her as rather chaste, and, most importantly, she does not use her sexuality to get ahead. In fact, at one point, she explicitly tells Trainer, "If you really think that I said I loved you as part of scheme, then that is really pathetic," and the films proves her right. She flirts with Trainer when she first meets him at a party only because Cynthia gave her a valium to calm her, and Trainer insists on them drinking tequila. When she wakes up next to him in her underwear the next morning, she is shocked and quite relieved when he tells her that she passed out and he put her to bed. Like Katharine, Tess is shown in her underwear several times in the film, but whereas Katharine uses her looks strategically on the men around her, Tess is either with Cynthia and getting dressed for a party or she complains to her boyfriend, Mick (Alec Baldwin), that he always buys her underwear for her birthday. She is displayed only for the audience outside of the film (and I will have more to say about this in the section on visual culture in chapter 11), not trying to attract a man within the fictional world. Moreover, she breaks up with her boyfriend because he cheated on her before she finally sleeps with Jack, and when she does, she is wearing virginal white. Ambitious as she is, she is also cast as a prototypical "good girl" who gets rewarded by the narrative for her exemplary mores. Class and gender are thus inextricably tied together.

Questions for Self-Study

1.　Analyze the gender performance of Katniss and other characters in *The Hunger Games*. How would you generally evaluate the novels'/films' take on gender and sexuality?
2.　Do online research on sickle cell diseases. Why was this disease used by some in the United States to argue for an essentialist understanding of race? Why does the diseases rather show that race is constructed?

(margin note) women who play by the rules

(margin note) a prototypical "good girl"

3. Which effects of structural racism could be observed in Germany (or another country you want to focus on) during the coronavirus pandemic?
4. Do online research on Caitlyn Jenner and Rachel Dolezal. Why is it socially accepted to change one's gender but not one's racial identity? Would it be possible to choose one's class identity freely?

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7 Queerness and Intersectionality

There are several other identity categories that I have mentioned only in passing or not at all so far, for example, age, weight, and disability. Age is an interesting category because the meanings ascribed to it have developed considerably in western culture in the past decades. Traditionally, old age was seen as a marker of wisdom and authority. But due to increasing life expectancy what counts as "old" or "young" has been reconceptualized. Moreover, western cultures are now more and more celebrating youthfulness with the result that the connotations of "young" and "old" have changed. Consequently, there is now increasing talk about "agism" as discrimination on the basis of age. While the concept is neutral and thus can be applied to people both considered too young or too old, it is mostly used for the latter. Weight has also received more and more scholarly attention in recent years, first in the U.S., but now in other countries as well. What scholars are interested in is how bodies that don't fit the norms constructed by medical and other discourses – bodies that are seen as obese or even extremely obese – are stigmatized and tied to connotations such as laziness, lack of ambition, or unhealthiness, and even cast as a danger to public health. In similar fashion, the newly formed and highly interdisciplinary field of Disability Studies investigates how notions of ability and disability are culturally constructed and which meanings they take on. The increasing focus on these identity categories raises interesting questions: Do they function in exactly the same way as gender, race, and class? Are they as constructed as gender, race, and class are, or are they – beyond the general insight that there is no truth outside of discourse – somewhat realer? These and related questions are controversially discussed. I cannot answer them here because this would go way beyond the scope of this book.

age, weight, and disability

Instead of getting bogged down in these discussions I want to conclude our exploration of identity, and thus of the second element of the circuit of culture, by introducing the concepts of queerness and intersectionality. These two concepts have in common that they complicate what I have said about identity so far. Queerness, which I discuss in the first section, challenges the binarism of gender and other identity categories, their implicit or explicit reliance on either/or – be that the opposition between masculine and feminine, White and non-White, or dominant and oppressed. Intersectionality, which I turn to in the second and longer section, complicates the focus on one identity category at the time, as it stresses the entanglement and co-effects of several identity categories. Introducing this concept provides me with the theoretical equipment necessary to address a variety of representations where gender, race, and class intersect.

beyond binarisms

Queerness

"Queerness" or its adjective "queer" are no doubt terms that you are already familiar with. While they were hardly used in Germany when I was an undergraduate at the end of the 1990s, they are now everywhere to be heard and read. Some of you may have a very clear idea what they mean or even a strong opinion how they should be used, but others won't. Some of you might even feel confused about their meaning. This is not at all surprising, as they are used in two different ways. On the one hand, "queer-ness" is used as an umbrella term for sexual and gender identities that deviate from the norm. As you know by now, I use the term "norm" in a purely statistical sense. Some-thing is normal or the norm because it occurs statistically more frequently than other variations. But for other people, the norm is still the standard, the right way, the natural order of things. When it comes to gender and sexuality, this norm is a heterosexual cisgender identity. As you remember from the previous chapter, a cisgender identity is one where the social gender matches the sex determined at birth. And heterosexuality means of course that somebody is attracted to the opposite sex or gender: Somebody who is biologically male identifies as male and is sexually attracted to women, and somebody who is biologically female identifies as female and is attracted to men. "Queerness," then, comprises all identities that are not cisgender and heterosexual. It is an umbrella term for trans gender identities – biological women who identify as male, and biological men who identify as female – and sexual orientations that are not heterosexual – homosexuality, bisexuality, or asexuality.

However, "queerness" is also used in a narrower and more specific sense to denote identities that challenge the system of binary oppositions. On the one hand, these are intersex people, that is, people, whose biological identity is neither clearly male nor female. (Germany, as we saw in the last chapter, acknowledges these specific identities as a third, diverse sex by now.) On the other hand, these are genderqueer or nonbinary people who identify neither as male nor female, and whose gender expression is either androgynous, that is, neither clearly feminine nor masculine, or constantly fluctuating. Both intersex and genderqueer identities transcend the binary opposition along which we usually think about sex and gender. The existence of these identities shows that sex and gender are not a matter of either/or, of male or female, masculine or feminine. Instead, they suggest that we would better think of sex and gender as a continuum with many different possible positions between the two poles of male and female to which we usually reduce identities. Linguistically, this in-betweenness is these days expressed by referring to intersex, nonbinary, and transgender people as "they" and not as "he" or "she" because this would impose on them an identity that they reject for themselves.

As I observed in the introduction already, binary oppositions are often arbitrary but nevertheless attractive because they reduce complexity and make the world manage-able. It is therefore no surprise that there is resistance to queerness especially in this second sense because sex and gender are extremely important categories for all of us in all aspects of our lives. (This is not to say that there is none to it in the first sense

because of the challenge it poses to heteronormativity. I am writing this in June 2023, and Uganda has just introduced the death penalty for homosexuality.) Especially trans identities are still met with a lot of resistance and violent backlash. Some self-proclaimed feminists deny that trans women (that is, biological males who identify as female) are women, and some ultraconservatives even claim that trans women only assume this identity to be able to prey on cis women and girls in locker rooms and restrooms.

This backlash is to a certain degree the logical but sad consequence of the fact that queer identities – in both senses – have become increasingly accepted in many western countries and beyond. It was much different not that long ago. When I was a student, a good friend of mine waited a whole semester before she told me that she was homosexual and that the boyfriend she occasionally mentioned was actually a girlfriend. She swore me to secrecy, and there were quite a few people that she frequently interacted with but whom she never told about this, and whenever her girlfriend visited, they were extremely careful not to give themselves away in public. Now the situation is very different – at least in liberal university towns like Freiburg, where I studied, or Tübingen, where I am writing this book. When I walk from my office to the Historical Reading Room, I often see homosexual couples on campus holding hands or kissing. And about once per semester, a student informs me that while they are still listed as "Martin" by the computer system when they enroll in a class of mine, they would like to be referred to as "Sandra" (or, of course, the other way around), and perform their new gender identity openly in class.

<div style="text-align: right">increasingly accepted in many western countries</div>

Such visibility can trigger a backlash but also lead to further acceptance, which is why representations of queerness in different media are extremely important. This does not mean that representations of queer identities are always unproblematic. In fact, quite the opposite is often the case. Especially representations that are meant to appeal to a very broad audience often reproduce stereotypes, for example, about homosexual men as effeminate or hysterical. Often, popular media such as film and television also avoid the representation of homosexual or trans intimacy because their producers are worried about alienating parts of their audience. Think of an extremely successful TV show like *Modern Family* (2009-20), which prominently features a gay couple and thus, on one level, has without doubt contributed to the normalization and even naturalization of homosexuality and even gay parenthood, since Mitch and Cam, the two homosexual characters, adopt a baby in the very first episode. However, the show avoids depictions of intimacy between the two. They never kiss throughout the whole first season, which led to criticism by fans. As a consequence, they are shown kissing occasionally in later seasons, but these are usually chaste pecks and not passionate kisses. And while the two heterosexual couples are frequently seen in bed or discussing their sex lives, there is hardly any sexual banter between Mitch and Cam.

<div style="text-align: right">representations of queerness</div>

lesbianism
seen as less
threatening

Lesbian relationships are often represented more explicitly even in very popular cultural forms that cater to a broad audience. There are two reasons for that. First, lesbianism has historically been considered less threatening to heteronormativity. Female expressions of affection were and often still are more accepted because the line between friendship and intimacy is often seen as blurry (a fact my friend in Freiburg also capitalized on when her partner visited). Lesbian sex is also often dismissed as not quite "real" because it usually does not involve penetration. And lesbian sexual encounters are often dismissed as "just a phase" that is overcome once the girl (in these cases it's usually about a girl and not a grown woman) grows up and begins to be attracted to men. Thus, even though additional downloadable content for the immensely successful video game *The Last of Us* (2013) showed teenage protagonist Ellie's developing relationship with Riley, a girl her age, culminating in a kiss, quite a few fans of the game did not read her as homosexual. As a consequence, they were, as many reactions online show, taken aback when the sequel, *The Last of Us II* (2020), explicitly represented the now grown-up Ellie as lesbian. Second, lesbian intimacy is more frequently represented because the spectacle of two women having sex is often staged to cater to what critics call the male gaze. I discuss this concept and its history in detail in the section on visual culture in chapter 11. Let me therefore just say here that many men find the idea and the display of such sex appealing, as the popularity of lesbian porn among straight men shows. In non-pornographic texts, too, lesbian sex is therefore often displayed for the pleasure of the heterosexual male audience, which gets to look at two female bodies and not just one.

representa-
tions of
transgender
characters

Representations of homosexual characters in different media, then, have increased in recent years and become less stereotypical. The same is true, however, to a much lesser degree for representations of transgender characters and characters that are queer in the narrow sense of transcending binaries. But such identities are still even further away from being perceived as normal. In fact, for a long time, cultural representations tended to tie transness and queerness in this narrow sense to physical violence and mental illness. Think only of a critically acclaimed film such as *The Silence of the Lambs* (1991), in which the killer is ultimately revealed to be somebody who is biologically male but feels like a woman. In order to transform into one, they kill women to wear their skin. Such representations persist, but there are by now also others, especially in TV shows. This is due to the development of the TV landscape, especially the increasing importance of smaller cable channels and streaming services that cater not – or not only – to a more general audience (as the network does that produced *Modern Family*), but to a number of specialized audiences that often seek such representations intentionally. It is therefore hardly a coincidence that one of the earliest representations of a trans woman that avoids reproducing stereotypes and pathologizing transness occurred in Netflix's *Orange Is the New Black* (2013-2019). The character of Sophia Burset, a trans woman, was played by Laverne Cox, who became the first trans woman to win an Emmy.

When analyzing trans and queer characters in whatever medium and genre, it is therefore a good idea to pay special attention to which values and ideas they are tied to in the narrative. Reversely, it is worth investigating if a narrative associates its positive or negative characters with queerness. At the end of the previous chapter, I asked you to think about the representation of gender and sexuality in *The Hunger Games*. (If you haven't done this yet, you may want to take a few minutes to do so before you continue reading.) Surely, you have concluded that the film is quite progressive when it comes to gender. Katniss combines traditionally feminine and traditionally masculine character traits. She is caring and a tender big sister, but also the family's main provider and, as she proves in the arena, a courageous fighter. Peeta is physically strong, as one would expect of a man in such a story, but also very sensitive. He is very good at camouflage, which is a considered feminine rather than a considered masculine trait, because he loves ornamenting the cakes in his parents' bakery. That Katniss eventually chooses him over Gale, who represents a far more traditional version of masculinity, legitimates Peeta's softer, more feminine kind of masculinity completely.

<div style="text-align: right">*gender and sexuality in The Hunger Games*</div>

At the same time, *The Hunger Games*'s take on sexuality is very traditional. Neither novel nor film challenge the idea of heteronormativity, and the film in particular can be considered queerphobic. Katniss and Peeta might perform their gender identities to a certain degree unconventionally, but Katniss clearly identifies as female and Peeta as male. Neither in District 12, where they live, nor in any other district does there seem to be any space for trans identities or queerness more generally. Life in the districts is quite conservative in this regard. It is also highly gendered, with girls and women doing very different work from boys and men. Tellingly, each district has to send one girl and one boy to the annual Hunger Games. This shows that only two genders are acknowledged there, and that sex and gender are seen, in essentialist fashion, as naturally connected.

<div style="text-align: right">no challenge to heteronormativity</div>

In fact, the gender performance in the districts is tied by both the novel and the film, but especially by the latter, to the idea of naturalness. The people from the districts do not dye their hair; they do not wear make-up; they have only simple clothes and no money for accessories. This is why Effie (Elizabeth Banks), the representative of the Capitol, looks like a fish out of water at the reaping. Dressed in a tightly fitting pink dress, wearing heavy make-up as well as several accessories, and speaking in a high-pitched voice, she performs gender very differently, in a way that can be considered hyperfeminine and – because of the contrast to Katniss, her sister, and the other women in District 12 – extremely artificial. Her representation thus paves the way for the narrative to connect the inhabitants of the Capitol in general with ideas of artificiality and unnaturalness.

<div style="text-align: right">the idea of naturalness</div>

Unlike the people from the districts, most people living in the Capitol manipulate their hair, skin color, and body shape by way of surgery and with chemicals. (President Snow is an exception.) Their looks defy what would appear natural to western audiences, especially as they are constantly contrasted with the much different looking tributes

the Capitol
as unnatural

from the districts. Significantly, this casting of the people of the Capitol as unnatural goes hand in hand with suggestions of queerness in the film (and much less so in the novel where they are "only" represented as unnatural). Consider the following still, which is from the scene in which Katniss and Peeta arrive by train in the Capitol. They are greeted on the platform by a crowd of people who are excited that the Games will soon begin.

Fig. 3: Arrival scene from *The Hunger Games*

The gender performances in the Capitol are, on the one hand, far more exaggerated than in the districts; on the other, they are also more fluid. Whereas it is impossible to confuse men and women in the districts because all bear traditional markers of femininity or masculinity, gender is performed far more ambiguously in the Capitol, as most people dye their hair, wear make-up, and bright colors usually associated with feminine gender performance. Katniss and Peeta perceive their "fans" negatively because they do not care that the tributes they are welcoming will almost certainly die in the arena in a few days. The audience shares this perception, but for them the people from the Capitol are othered even further and in quite a problematic way. The images of them welcoming Katniss and Peeta, a mass of excited people with colorful hair and dresses, heavy make-up, and often ambivalent gender performances are bound to evoke connotations with gay pride parades such as the ones on Christopher Street Day. For the audience, their uncaring attitude is thus tied to their ambiguous gender performance and notions of queerness.

connotati-
ons with gay
pride par-
ades

Accordingly, the film *The Hunger Games* is ultimately quite ambivalent. Its take on femininity and masculinity is quite progressive, but at the same time it participates in the long tradition of representing queerness as negative and unnatural. What we can

take from this observation is that our evaluation of texts of all kinds can change considerably depending on which aspects we focus on and with which theories we approach them. Frequently, the overall picture gets more and more complex, the more aspects we consider in our analysis. It is therefore also a good idea to focus not on one identity category in isolation, but to investigate the interconnectedness of several of them.

<div style="text-align: right">ambiva-
lence of The
Hunger Ga-
mes</div>

Intersectionality

One major and entirely justified criticism of past feminist movements was that these movements universalized and de facto essentialized the notion of woman, thus ignoring that different groups of women were (and, of course, still are) affected by oppression in different ways and to different degrees. A middle-class woman is in a very different position than a working-class woman; a White middle-class woman is in a very different position than a Black middle-class woman, who, in turn, is in a different position than a Black working-class woman; a cis Black working class woman is in a different position than a queer Black working class woman; and so on. Quite obviously, identity categories never operate in isolation. Investigating the discrimination of Black women in the 1990s, Kimberlé Crenshaw therefore introduced the concept of intersectionality to capture how their oppression could not be explained by focusing on either sexism or racism but only by considering the complex interplay between the two.

<div style="text-align: right">intersectio-
nality</div>

Crenshaw developed her theory of intersectionality about 30 years ago, but it took some time before other scholars began to apply it more widely. By now, however, Cultural Studies and related fields and disciplines use the theory to understand how two or more identity categories intersect, that is, how they are intertwined in specific cases to produce effects of oppression and privilege. It is important not to forget about privilege. Take me as an example. I am privileged because I am White; I am even more privileged because I am a cis man; even more so because I am heterosexual; even more so because I am upper middle-class, and so on.

<div style="text-align: right">effects of
oppression
and privi-
lege</div>

Crenshaw was mainly interested in real-life experiences of oppression. But as we know well by now such experiences are shaped by the discourses of a given culture at a certain time, and thus by representations of all kinds. Accordingly, we can use her theory of intersectionality – just like nearly all theories that we have encountered so far – to analyze effects of oppression and privilege in specific representations just as much as in real life. Let's therefore return to gender, race, and class – the identity categories I focused on in the previous chapter – and discuss a number of representations and their links to larger cultural discourses. I have not done this so far because, in representation just as much as in real life, these (and other) identity categories hardly ever operate in isolation. Now, however, we have the tools we need to analyze different representations and stereotypes in which race, class, and gender intersect.

<div style="text-align: right">real-life ex-
periences
and repre-
sentations</div>

You probably remember that I quoted from Lois Tyson's book to provide an example of contemporary hegemonic femininity in the section on gender. Here's the quote again:

> In upwardly mobile, middle-class American culture today, the woman on the pedestal is the woman who successfully juggles a career and a family, which means she looks great at the office and over the breakfast table, and she's never too tired after work to fix dinner, clean house, attend to all her children's needs, and please her husband in bed. (Tyson 91)

I mentioned back then that ideals of femininity (or masculinity, for that matter) are never only about gender and already pointed out how they are tied to issues of class and sexuality in Tyson's example. But other identity categories intersect here as well. The ideal woman defined here is not only middle-class and heterosexual; she is also married and has children – and we can consider marital and parental status as additional identity categories. If you close your eyes and picture this woman you will without doubt imagine her as able-bodied, slim, and traditionally beautiful. Since she has children that she has to care for, she is probably between her late twenties and mid-forties. (Age and femininity, by the way, are very closely connected in western culture. Just think about how we are surrounded by images of young female bodies and how women once they get older become more and more invisible. This shows how much cultural ideas about femininity are still tied to the body.) Race is not explicitly mentioned here but reading the description you may be thinking of a White woman because this is still very much the norm in western cultures. Theoretically, the ideal would also be attainable for women from other races as long as they tick all the boxes. But they are even less likely to achieve this than White women, for whom this ideal is also mostly unreachable, because of the long history of discrimination against BIPoCs.

In the past, models of hegemonic femininity were of course more openly racialized. One example, again from the United States, is the mid-19th century ideal of True Womanhood. This model of hegemonic femininity restricted women entirely to the domestic sphere (I will have more to say about space and how it is gendered in chapter 10). Accordingly, this ideal was only available to middle- and upper-class women who were so wealthy or whose husbands earned enough money that they did not need to earn money themselves. (Working-class families have almost always depended on both spouses working in order to generate enough income.) Sheltered from negative outward influences in the confines of her home, solely dedicated to the well-being of her husband and children, a "true woman" would serve as her family's moral compass. As the embodiment of absolute purity, she would instill these values in her children and also remind her husband of them, that is, purify him, whenever his necessary contact with the corrupting influences of the outside world had negatively affected him. Unlike her contemporary counterpart, the 19th-century ideal of femininity was represented as not interested in sex. Middle- and upper-class White women were thought to not possess any sex drive. Intercourse was something that they endured as a necessary evil to satisfy their husbands' needs and to have children. In the culture's understanding, this set them apart from Black women.

Whereas White women were thought to be asexual, Black women were imagined to be hypersexual in the 19th century. Generally perceived as closer to animals in the racial hierarchy of the time, they were also regarded as unable to control their sexuality. The racist stereotype of the Jezebel – named after the biblical figure that married King Ahab – claimed that Black women had an insatiable sexual appetite, and that they were by nature promiscuous. Visual and narrative representations that perpetuated this stereotype served the sinister function of justifying the sexual exploitation of Black women during slavery and beyond it. The idea that Black women craved sex with White men legitimized the forced sexual relations that many slaveowners had with their female slaves. The stereotype also made it nearly impossible for free Black women to have courts convict White men who had raped them. A Black woman, the racist logic went, could not be raped because she always desired sex.

<div style="text-align: right">the stereo-
type of the
Jezebel</div>

However, stereotypes are often contradictory – either in themselves or in combination. Alongside the Jezebel stereotype, which cast Black women as nymphomaniac, there also existed the stereotype of the Mammy. Aunt Chloe, Uncle Tom's wife in Harriet Beecher Stowe's novel, which I already mentioned in the previous chapter, embodies this stereotype, but the most famous example is without doubt Ruth, Scarlett O'Hara's mammy in Margaret Mitchell's novel *Gone with the Wind* (1936) and the even more famous film from 1939 based on it. Whereas the Jezebel is young and attractive, the Mammy is middle-aged and corpulent; whereas the Jezebel is hypersexual and aggressively pursues her desires, the Mammy is asexual, passive, and demure. She is a loyal servant to her White masters during and even after slavery and depends on their guidance. Thus, even though she is in many ways diametrically opposed to the Jezel, she served the same function of justifying White supremacy and the oppression of Black people.

<div style="text-align: right">the stereo-
type of the
Mammy</div>

Stereotypes of Black men are equally contradictory. A stereotype of Black masculinity that corresponds in many ways to that of the Mammy is named after Uncle Tom, the eponymous hero of Stowe's novel. Countless 19th-century representations perpetuated this stereotype. They depict Black men as docile, submissive, and of inferior intelligence (something I already mentioned in the previous chapter). Uncle Tom characters in fiction and beyond also legitimized slavery because they were depicted as entirely dependent on White guidance, as ideal servants who could only thrive under the benevolent patronage of their White masters for whom they would do anything if they were only treated kindly. However, alongside this somewhat benevolent but nevertheless racist stereotype, there also existed the far more sinister stereotype of the Black brute, which corresponds to that of the Jezebel. Texts that perpetuated this stereotype saw Black masculinity as aggressive and animalistic. Black men, such representations held, were like animals both with regard to their physical strength and in that they could not control their urges and desires. They were said to pose a particular danger to the sexual purity of White women, and the specter of the Black rapist figures prominently in many cultural texts, most (in)famously maybe in D.W. Griffith's film

<div style="text-align: right">stereotypes
of Black
men</div>

The Birth of a Nation (1915), which led to a resurgence of the racist Ku Klux Klan. In many ways diametrically opposed to the Uncle Tom stereotype, this stereotype served the same function of justifying slavery and, once it had been abolished, the continued oppression of Blacks, who were not given equal rights until the 1960s. Such oppression was necessary, the stereotype implied, because Black men were a danger to Whites and to civilization as such.

As the manifestation of the stereotype in a film shows, such racist representations of Black men and women are not merely a matter of the 19th century. I have used the past tense above because many of them emerged in the 19th century and were most powerful back then, but these stereotypes remain influential until today. Just think about how police officer Darren Wilson described Michael Brown, an unarmed Black teenager who he shot in Fergusson, Missouri on August 9, 2014, because he felt threatened by him: "[H]e looked up at me and had the most intense aggressive [sic] face. The only way I can describe it, it looks like a demon, that's how angry he looked […] He turns, and when he looked at me, he made like a grunting, like aggravated sound and he starts, he turns and he's coming back towards me" ("State of Missouri v. Darren Wilson" 224-25, 227). Wilson's representation of Brown, which may or may not accurately represent his perception of him when he shot him, clearly evokes the stereotype of the Black brute, as he represents Brown not only as extremely aggressive, which does not correspond to how witnesses perceived Brown's behavior, and as an animal that grunts, and even a demon.

On the whole, however, such explicitly racist representations have become less acceptable and therefore rarer in recent decades. Many cultural texts now feature more complex and positive representations of Blacks; others, though, feature new stereotypes that are less overtly racist but nevertheless problematic and often contain elements of the older, more openly racist stereotypes. Think, for example, of the representation of Thresh, whose name already evokes associations with trash, in *The Hunger Games*. Thresh (Dayo Okeniyi) is the male tribute from District 11, and both in the novel and the film the people from that district are clearly marked as Black. Whereas Katniss forms a close relationship with Rue (Amandla Stenberg), the girl from District 11, and decorates her body with flowers when she has been killed, she has only one interaction with Thresh. When another female tribute, Clove (Isabelle Fuhrman), has defeated Katniss and is about to begin to slowly torture her to death, Thresh comes out of nowhere and kills Clove. In the novel, he "brings [a] rock down hard against Clove's temple" (287); in the film, he slams her against a wall, cracking her spine and skull. He can do that because he is the largest tribute, far stronger than all others except maybe Cato. Tellingly, he spares Katniss because she was an ally of Rue and mourned her although the rules of the Games forbid that: "Just this one time, I let you go. For the little girl," he tells her in the novel (287). He disappears into the woods, and Katniss never sees him again, as he is soon killed by another tribute, sparing her the awkwardness of having to fight him later.

stereotypes remain influential until today

new stereotypes

Thresh is an embodiment of what Matthew Hughey has called the stereotype of the "Magical Negro." This stereotype has become fairly prominent in film and TV shows in recent years. We find it, for example, in *The Green Mile* (1999) or *The Legend of Bagger Vance* (2000). On the surface, it entails a positive representation of Black characters, as they are no longer depicted as a danger to the White protagonists but support them instead. However, that is all they do. Their only purpose in the narrative is to aid the White characters. Like Thresh in *The Hunger Games*, "Magical Negro" characters appear literally out of nowhere and they disappear once their work is done, and the White protagonist can get on without them. They do not have a history or a family, nor any goals and desires of their own. Moreover, they often carry traces of older, more openly racist stereotypes. The representation of Thresh, for instance, clearly evokes the stereotype of the Black brute. With his superior strength and the very physical way he kills Clove – think about how this contrasts with Katniss's use of bow and arrow – he is, especially in the film where he does not even use a stone as a weapon, clearly represented as animalistic. The only reason why he is not perceived negatively by readers and the movie audience is that he uses his overwhelming strength to save Katniss and not to hurt her. (By the way, women can also perform the role of the "Magical Negro." Only think of Louise, played by Jennifer Hudson, in the first *Sex and the City* movie [2008].)

the "Magical Negro"

So far, I have discussed the connection between race and gender only with regard to Whiteness and Blackness. In the United States in particular, race was for a long time considered mostly a binary opposition, with the distinction between White and non-White trumping all others. But race is, of course, not a binary system, and even those who (still) have an essentialist perspective on it think that there are more than two races. (The constructionists, as you well know by now, would stress that race is a cultural idea, not a biological fact.) To balance the picture, I would like to devote a few paragraphs to the intersections of Asianness and gender. Obviously, the term "Asianness" is already problematic, as it lumps together very different cultures and ethnicities. But what we are dealing with is, once again, the (western) perspective, and there these differences often disappear.

the intersections of Asianness and gender

In fact, representations of Asian cultures and people are often part of what Edward Said has called orientalism. In his influential theory, representations of the Eastern world – reaching from Turkey and the Middle East via India to Japan and China – do not distinguish between the cultures and countries at all but treat them uniformly. According to Said, orientalism is a western discourse that is not interested in accuracy (and there is no truth outside of discourse anyway), but whose purpose is to stress the supremacy of "the west" over "the east" – as more advanced, more cultured, and, thus, naturally dominant. Said's theory, which he developed in a book that came out in the late 1970s, has been much criticized and modified since then. It has been pointed out, for example, that Said himself homogenizes and indeed constructs a uniform western discourse instead of paying attention to national and cultural specificities. But his the-

orientalism

ory has never been completely dismissed and remains an important instrument for understanding western conceptualizations of, most broadly speaking, eastern cultures and people.

the western perception of Asia is gendered

Interestingly, the western perception of Asia is gendered. The region and its people are perceived as feminine, which allows, in turn, the casting of the west and its people as masculine and thus as superior in a traditional gender order. Such a perception can have very concrete consequences. For example, scholars have investigated dating apps and found that men of all races prefer Asian women (Chow and Hu). They get the most responses and are most frequently contacted because they are perceived as hyperfeminine in very traditional terms: as petite, attractive, submissive, and thus overall attractive. By contrast, Asian men receive considerably fewer responses than Black, Hispanic, or White men because they are also perceived as rather feminine and thus as not particularly attractive. (White men, by the way, are most sought after by women of all races. This shows that racist ideas that claim that they are particularly masculine are held not only by White women but have been internalized by women of other ethnicities as well.)

the opera *Madama Butterfly*

The perception of Asian people as effeminate and thus of Asian women as hyperfeminine and particularly desirable has a long tradition in the western world. An important text in this regard is the opera *Madama Butterfly* (1904) by the Italian composer Giacomo Puccini. It is based on an American short story and a play that were written a few years earlier (which shows that this is indeed a discourse not restricted to one country). The opera is about the relationship between an American soldier, stationed in Japan at the end of the 19th century, and a Japanese geisha, nicknamed Butterfly for her beauty and tenderness, who embodies all the stereotypical notions outlined above. Indeed, she loves the American so much that she lets him take their child away when he returns to her with his American wife three years after leaving her. As she cannot imagine life without him or the child, which she loves mostly because of him, it appears, she kills herself at the end of the opera.

the play *M. Butterfly*

But as always there are not only representations that confirm such racist notions but also those that challenge them. One example is the play *M. Butterfly* (1988) by the Asian-American playwright David Henry Hwang. He rewrites Puccini's opera and criticizes orientalist ideas by drawing on an espionage case that was widely discussed in the 1980s: the French diplomat Bernard Boursicot had revealed secrets for more than twenty years to the male Chinese spy Shi Pei Pu with whom he had an affair. Fascinatingly, Boursicot thought that Shi was a woman, and Shi also made him believe that they had a child together. Apparently, during the two decades of their relationship Boursicot never saw Shi naked with the lights on, a fact that he apparently ascribed to "her" natural Asian shyness. It is not quite clear why he did not realize he had sex with man. The journalist Joyce Wadler, who wrote the book *Liaison* (1993) about their relationship, argues that Shi could manipulate his penis and testicles to create the illusion of a vagina and clitoris. The play does not mention this explanation, thus sug-

gesting that the couple had anal sex, and that Boursicot did not realize that it was not vaginal intercourse because he thought that Shi's vagina was just tighter than that of western women. This is another stereotype about Asian women, adding to their alleged hyperfemininity, circulating among western men until today (Hu).

Hwang's play presents a fictionalized version of this story that exposes the orientalist mindset that made the Frenchman's deception possible. Part of the play is set in court where the Chinese spy, called Song in the play, is questioned by the French judge. His answers bring to the fore how much he is aware of western ideas about the east and how cleverly he exploited them:

the orientalist mindset

> SONG: As soon as a Western man comes into contact with the East – he's already confused. The West has sort of an international rape mentality toward the East. Do you know rape mentality?
> JUDGE: Give me your definition, please?
> SONG: Basically, "Her mouth says no, but her eyes say yes." The West thinks of itself as masculine – big guns, big industry, big money – so the East is feminine – weak, delicate, poor … but good art, and full of inscrutable wisdom – the feminine mystique. (Hwang 83)

I could not come up with a better summary for my point about the intersection of race and gender, and therefore I leave it at that.

To conclude our discussion of intersectionality, a few words about the intersections of class and gender in representations. Interestingly, the gendering of class often depends on how the economy is doing at that time. Broadly speaking, in a bust economy, that is, in times of recession when many people are unemployed and suffering, Hollywood often produces romantic comedies in which an upper-class woman – a stereotypical spoilt rich girl – is educated about life by a middle-class man. By contrast, in a boom economy, that is, in times when the economy is growing and many people are making a lot of money, romantic comedies usually tell stories of tough upper-class businessmen who need to be reminded of the fact that money is not everything by working- or middle-class women.

the intersections of class and gender

Two romantic comedies that represent these tendencies prototypically are *It Happened One Night* (1934) and *Pretty Woman* (1990). The first film was made and is set during the Great Depression. At its center is the rich heiress Ellen (Claudette Colbert) who escapes from her father's yacht outside Miami to make her way back to New York where she wants to reunite with her upper-class husband King Westley (Jameson Thomas) – note the name! – who she married secretly against her father's will. Pursued by the private investigators he has hired and out of money she teams up with the journalist Peter (Clark Gable), who has recognized her. He promises to bring her to New York in exchange for the exclusive rights to her story. They take the bus, and during the several days on the road they – of course! – fall in love. More importantly, the down-to-earth Peter teaches Ellen about life and for the first time she sees how people live who are less well off than she is. While Peter hardly develops over the course

It Happened One Night

of the film, Ellen changes tremendously. She grows up into a responsible member of society who does not take her privileges for granted anymore and even comes to appreciate aspects of a simpler life.

Pretty Woman, made when some of the negative effects of the economic boom of the 1980s became apparent, tells in many ways the reverse story. Edward (Richard Gere) is a successful businessman who buys struggling companies and sells them in parts to the highest bidder, making many of the employees lose their jobs. Coming to Los Angeles, he picks up the prostitute Vivian (Julia Roberts), and after spending the night with her hires her for a week to accompany him to the social events that are tied to his current business deal. Vivian is not represented in any negative way, as sex workers often are in cultural representations, but embodies the opposite stereotype: the hooker with the heart of gold. She might be doing work frowned upon by society, but her value system is in order. As the film's center of moral authority, she reforms Edward within days, transforming his exploitational finance capitalism, which only generates money but does not produce anything else, into a more traditional variant. Instead of destroying the ailing company he is targeting, he decides to save it so that it can continue to build ships and, of course, employ workers. Like Ellen and Peter, Vivian and Edward become a couple at the end of the film, but whereas Ellen develops and changes her values in *It Happened One Night*, it is Edward who changes in *Pretty Woman*.

Times of economic bust thus bring about narratives in which a detached upper class woman is cast as in need of grounding by masculine middle-class values; times of economic boom, by contrast, bring about narratives in which a harsh form of upper-class masculinity is associated with exploitation and thus needs to be transformed into a more caring and literally more productive variety through the influence of middle-class femininity. (That *Pretty Woman* runs into certain contradictions telling this story is something I address in the context of different ways of reading in the section on consumption in the next chapter.) Of course, both films ultimately do not challenge the idea of capitalism and a stratified class society as such. Both present romantic unions across the class divide as the ultimate solution to society's problems.

> ## Questions for Self-Study
>
> 1. What are the earliest representations of queerness that you have come across? In which media and genres did they occur? How was queerness represented in these cases?
> 2. How is Cinna (Lenny Kravitz) represented in the film version of *The Hunger Games*?
> 3. How have gender, race, class, and other identity categories you can think of intersected during the pandemic to produce effects of discrimination or privilege?

romantic
unions
across the
class divide

4. Look again at Albert Hammond's song "The Free Electric Band." Which identity categories evoked are important, and how do they intersect?

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8 Production, Consumption, and Regulation

So far, I have devoted three chapters each to the first two elements on the circuit of culture. Now the time has come to speed things up, and I will discuss the remaining three elements in one chapter. Production, consumption, and regulation are important to any thorough cultural analysis, but they are not as central to the field as representation and identity are. (Indeed, many of your classes will focus almost exclusively on these two elements.) Cultural Studies is not economics, and therefore it is not interested in what one might call production for its own sake. It does not ask which system of production is more effective. Instead, it ties production – but also consumption and regulation – to the construction of meanings and identities, and it asks how production, consumption, and regulation influence each other. Accordingly, these are the topics I focus on in this chapter. I devote one section to each of the concepts, but, as we progress, I will occasionally return to earlier concepts to discuss, for example, how consumption can have an impact on production. Throughout the chapter, I will draw on *Doing Cultural Studies* (1997, 2013) by Paul du Gay and his colleagues and their discussion of the production, consumption, and regulation of the Walkman, a portable cassette player that the Japanese company Sony brought out in 1979. I also repeatedly use examples from Hollywood cinema to exemplify how, for example, Hollywood's specific mode of production shapes the meaning of the films created.

Production

Production is, as suggested above already, a concept from the field of economics. That Paul du Gay and his colleagues make it one of the five key elements of the circuit of culture shows the lasting influence of Marxist thought on British Cultural Studies. Karl Marx, whose theory of class conflict I discussed in chapter 6, was, of course, interested in a specific mode of capitalist industrial production. In other words, he was interested in the manufacturing of actual material goods. Cultural Studies is concerned with this form of production as well, be it the Walkman or any other material object. But the field is also interested in the production of representations. This interest does not stand in contradiction to the interest in the manufacturing of material goods such as the Walkman but complements it. After all, the Walkman carries specific meanings just as much as texts and images do. Moreover, texts and images are of course also part of the capitalist economy, and they need some material basis. Books need to be printed, films need to be shot, and so on. The production of goods and of meaning always goes hand in hand.

One aspect of production that Cultural Studies is specifically interested in is how production and especially the invention of a new product are represented – both by the company behind the product and the culture at large. In *Doing Cultural Studies*, Paul

du Gay and his co-authors discuss several narratives about the invention of the Walk-man. They show how one narrative singles out Akio Morita, one of the founders of Sony. Morita functions in these accounts as what du Gay and his colleagues call a "he-roic individual" (39), as a visionary who pushed his idea through and succeeded against all odds. Another narrative highlights Sony's allegedly specific company culture and thus the "Japaneseness" of the innovation process, suggesting the Walkman could not have been invented anywhere else. By contrast, a third narrative emphasizes that "a routine organizational change" and thus "a rather happy accident" put the inventors on the right track (46). Du Gay and his colleagues stress that they do not know which of these stories is the accurate one. Given what you have learned about narratives and the production of truth in this book, this should not surprise you at all. However, they also point out that the three narratives have in common that company strategy and systematic planning are downplayed, although "a number of sources indicate that there *was* a large amount of careful planning" (46; italics in the original).

It is impossible to determine if the alternative narrative du Gay and his co-authors favor is truly more accurate – something they are very well aware of – but there is a general tendency in the entertainment business to downplay strategy and to highlight heroic individualism or happy coincidences, and sometimes both at the same time. Take, for example, the transition from silent to sound film in Hollywood cinema, which occurred in the late 1920s. It had been possible to record sound from the mid-1890s onward already, but it was difficult to synchronize sound and images when the latter were edited, that is, when shots recorded at different times were joined in post-production to create a coherent narrative, and the amplification of sound during the exhibition in movie theaters also proved challenging. Moreover, during the early 1920s, two com-peting systems for recording sound were being developed: one recorded the sound on a disk; the other, which eventually won out, recorded it next to the images on the film strip.

The big film studios that controlled the market were well aware that the transition to sound would eventually happen, but they agreed to make the transition all at the same time (which made sense because they were also showing films from rival companies in the movie theaters they owned) and to lean back and wait for the right moment (which also made sense because their businesses were going so well that there was no need for them to take any risks). They left experimenting with sound to the smaller studios whose far more precarious situation required them to risk more. Only when Warner Brothers had big successes with sound films like *The Jazz Singer* (1927), did the big studios begin the transition in a concerted, structured, and very swift way. By 1930, silent films had nearly completely disappeared.

However, this is not how the transition is represented in Hollywood films like *Singin' in the Rain* (1952), which self-reflexively address the development of the film industry and paint a very specific picture of it. In these films, the transition is usually depicted as chaotic, spontaneous, and initially not very successful. It takes place against the

the transition from silent to sound film

the big film studios

Singin' in the Rain

backdrop of conflicts over love and fame between characters who are stereotypically cast as either morally good or evil. It is due to the individual efforts of the positive characters – in *Singin' in the Rain* the already established male star Don (Gene Kelly) and the chorus girl Kathy (Debbie Reynolds) – as well as a number of happy coincidences such as the repeated chance meetings between the two that the transition to sound is eventually successful.

Just as with the Walkman, then, Hollywood's own narratives about the innovation of sound downplay strategy and planning. They draw attention away from the fact that film studios are part of a usually highly efficient capitalist mode of production. You may be familiar with the phrase "dream factory" that is often used to refer to Hollywood. It is very accurate. Not only does Hollywood produce narratives that answer to and fuel our dreams and desires; the film studios are also factories. Especially between the 1920s and 1950s – the time of the so-called Classical Hollywood Cinema – the film studios were organized just like other factories were at the time. Today, the mode of production has changed in that hardly any film is now produced under one roof by one company alone. But what hasn't changed is that the production of films is extremely well organized and – just think of the endless credit sequences of contemporary films – highly specialized. As little as possible is left to coincidence and individual heroism.

dream factory

Unsurprisingly, the way production is organized has an impact on the meaning of the product, be that an object like the Walkman or a film. At the most general level, the question of how much money is available is of course always an issue, and this is maybe most obvious when it comes to the production of representations. Take, for example, the famous "Fly" episode from season 3 of the TV show *Breaking Bad* (2008-13). Unlike all other episodes of the show, it is set almost completely within the secret meth lab where Walter (Bryan Cranston) and Jesse (Aaron Paul) work. After Jesse leaves at the end of the day, Walter spends most of the episode hunting a fly that has somehow made it into the lab. Obviously, such an episode is rather cheap to produce. Only one set, the lab, that has been used before is needed, and for most of the episode only one actor is needed. And that's exactly why the episode was produced. It was thought up because the show had gone hopelessly over budget, and money had to be saved to be able to finish the season as planned. The episode was thus added for purely commercial reasons, but it adds greatly to the characterization of Walter White, bringing his growing obsession and inability to let go of things to the fore very pointedly. It is crucial for the meaning of the show.

production has an impact on meaning

Another example that is less obvious at first sight (with the *Breaking Bad* episode everybody wondered immediately what was going on when it first aired) but also extremely important for the characterization of the protagonist is a scene from *Raiders of the Lost Ark* (1981), the first Indiana Jones movie. After he has overcome a number of enemies armed with sticks during a street fight in Cairo, Indiana Jones (Harrison Ford) is confronted by an enemy with a sword. As he eyes his opponent, suspense is built whether he will be able to overcome this deadly threat with his iconic whip, the weapon he has

Raiders of the Lost Ark

used so far. Then, to the surprise of the audience and his enemy, Jones pulls a gun and shoots his opponent. This characterizes him as somebody who is, at least at this point in the story, no shiny hero but rather unscrupulous in his methods. The screenplay, however, called for Jones to disarm his opponent with his whip. But actor Harrison Ford could not perform this stunt that day because he was suffering from food poisoning. He was too weak for filming a fight but could be filmed firing the shot. Since the production needed to continue – each delay costs a studio a lot of money – the story was adapted accordingly.

In the cases discussed so far, the original plans were changed shortly before or during the actual filming. Sometimes, however, the director or the producer adds things during the post-production of a film, when all the material filmed is edited into a coherent story. A nice example is a moment in the formal dinner scene in *Pretty Woman* when Vivian (Julia Roberts) struggles with identifying and correctly using the right cutlery. At one point, a snail flies off the special tongs she is using to hold it into the room and is caught by a waiter standing in the background. However, when the actual scene was filmed, the waiter did not catch the snail. Garry Marshall, the director, filmed him doing it while the actors were taking a break and, as he points out in his autobiography (162-64), without ever intending to use the shot. It was only in the editing room that he changed his mind, creating an additional comic effect that depends entirely on a mode of production that requires a post-production.

Watching the film, you cannot notice any of this because of the specific way in which Hollywood films tell their stories. The short part of the scene that I just described consists of nearly a dozen different shots, joined during editing. It is impossible to notice that the shot of the waiter catching the snail was filmed at a different moment. We need additional information for that. In fact, if we watch the film just for fun and without consciously analyzing it, it is unlikely that we notice most of the cuts, that is, the transitions from one shot to another, at all. For decades, Hollywood films have been edited in a way that aims at making the editing itself as invisible as possible. The idea behind this invisible editing is to create as strong an illusion as possible and to allow the audience to completely immerse themselves in the story.

Why, then, you might be asking yourselves now, are Hollywood films made in a way that requires that much editing? One could argue, after all, that using longer individual shots and thus reducing the need for editing would create the desired effect. Certain European schools of filmmaking, for example, the French New Wave of the 1960s considered long takes, that is, shots that last at least half and often several minutes, and sparse editing, as particularly realistic. In Hollywood, however, films like Alfred Hitchcock's *Rope* (1948), which creates the illusion that it was filmed as one single shot (roughly every twelve minutes when the roll of film in the camera had to be changed, the camera captures the dark back of a couch or something similar to allow for a secret changing of the roll) remained an exception. That's because Hollywood film studios encouraged their directors to film short shots which would then be joined during

post-production. (An exception was made for Hitchcock once because he was greatly trusted. Moreover, *Rope* is set entirely in one apartment and features only a few actors.)

There are several reasons for this specific form of production, which, in turn, of course, create specific meanings. For once, this form of editing allows the frequent inclusion of close-ups, that is, shots where an object or a part of the body, usually the face, is singled out. Close-ups allow filmmakers to emphasize objects that are important for the narrative, thus making it easier for the audience to follow the story. They also allow the filmmakers to display the good looks of the stars featuring in the film. And that's important because stars have always been important for the success of a Hollywood film.

<div style="float:right">close-ups</div>

Moreover, shots of a few seconds then joined during editing are much faster and thus cheaper to film than long takes. Not that much can go wrong, and if something goes wrong, everything is quickly back to square one and another attempt can be made. By contrast, a long take takes very long to set up – especially if several actors and movement are involved – and if something goes wrong a few seconds before the end, the whole shot is lost. There is therefore the risk that many hours or even a complete day of filming might be wasted, and the production will fall behind schedule and go over budget. Thus, Hollywood's preferred style of filming is more economic.

<div style="float:right">an economic style of filming</div>

Finally, filming short shots takes power away from the director, who is necessary during the filming, and gives it to the producer, who can do the post-production without the director if they prefer. Contrary to popular lore, Hollywood directors are often not responsible – or not alone responsible – for the final product that audiences then get to watch. That's why DVDs and streaming services sometimes offer a director's cut – the film as envisioned by the director. However, if directors do not film short shots but entire scenes in one shot, producers do not have the possibility to change much during post-production. Producers therefore prefer working with directors who abide by the rules of Hollywood cinema. That's why some acclaimed European directors, used to different styles and modes of production, did not succeed in Hollywood. Max Ophuls, for example, a Jewish director who fled from the Nazis to the United States in 1941, was welcomed with high expectations in Hollywood. But the enthusiasm quickly faded when producers realized that Ophuls was unwilling to give up his preference for extremely long shots. Soon after the war he returned to Europe where films were produced differently.

<div style="float:right">empowering the producer</div>

Consumption

What I have said above about production also goes for consumption. It is not only an economic category but inextricably tied to questions of representation and identity. Not only do we consume representations as much as we consume material goods; the consumption of goods and of meaning always goes hand in hand. We pay for movie tickets, subscriptions to Spotify or Netflix, the books we read, but also the clothes we

<div style="float:right">consumption of goods and of meaning</div>

wear to express our identity, and other objects – the Walkman three decades ago and now maybe smartphones – that articulate who we are. I would like to begin with two theories of consumption that claim exactly the opposite about meaning and consumption. One sees consumers as entirely passive and argues that meaning is created only during production. The other sees consumers as extremely active and argues that meaning is mostly created during consumption. I will then suggest that the best approach to consumption and meaning lies in the middle.

production of consumption approach

Du Gay and his co-authors call the theory that regards consumption as entirely passive the production of consumption approach. This theory was developed by members of the so-called Frankfurt School such as Max Horkheimer, Theodor Adorno, or Herbert Marcuse. As you will notice immediately, they were heavily influenced by Marxist ideas. These theorists argue not only that consumers are entirely passive; they also see them as the helpless victims of capitalist production. Consumers, they suggest, simply accept the meanings inscribed into a product – a material object like the Walkman or a Hollywood film – in the act of production, and these meanings keep consumers satisfied and prevent them from developing a genuine class consciousness, that is, an awareness of the exploitative structure of society, and thus any revolutionary spirit.

This theory is problematic for several reasons, and I will only discuss two here. First of all, it depends on the distinction between genuine and artificial needs. As du Gay and his collaborators explain,

> Herbert Marcuse used the notion of natural human needs in his critique of consumer capitalism. He argued that true needs were based in human biology and in the natural rhythm of human interaction, uninfluenced by the logics of modern consumer capitalism. False needs, on the other hand, were not natural but manipulated or induced by producers, advertisers and marketers; they had no basis in nature. (84-85)

needs are culturally constructed

Well, at this point in the book, you will have realized immediately how problematic this argument is. It is a story of decline in which everything was well before capitalism emerged. More importantly, it depends on the binary between nature and culture, which is, as we have seen, itself culturally constructed. And what we have learned from and about Foucault makes any reference to biology problematic. There is no truth outside of discourse, and biology is just one discourse among many and like others it changes over time. Accordingly, the distinction between genuine and false needs does not hold. All needs are culturally constructed. We may feel cold or hungry, but what these things mean is always dependent on discourses and systems of representation. It does not exist outside of them.

Secondly the theory of the production of consumption is problematic because it relies on a questionable distinction between high culture and mass culture. I have more to say about this in the section on popular culture in chapter 11. Let me just mention here that Horkheimer and Adorno consider high culture like opera or poetry to be untouched by the logic of capitalism and its mode of production. It somehow – and I use this "so-

mehow" intentionally – exists detached from the everyday world. Therefore, it is seen as valuable and answering to genuine needs. Mass culture, by contrast, is seen as the product of the culture industry. It is therefore artificial and false, and only satisfies the false needs created by capitalism. However, the distinction between high culture and mass culture is as problematic as the one between real and false needs. I will explain why that is the case in chapter 11. Bear with me until then.

the culture industry

A diametrically opposed theory considers consumption as appropriation and resistance. At the most basic level, this simply means that consumers are not passive but active. They do not merely accept the meanings inscribed into a product during production, but they create their own meanings. They actively resist the meanings created by the producers and appropriate it, that is, take over the product for uses unintended by the producers, thereby creating their own meanings. This theory was developed by the French sociologist and philosopher Michel de Certeau. As du Gay and his colleagues explain, it is important because it sees consumers as "active agents" (98), and there is a lot of evidence to back up this argument. The Walkman, for example, originally had two headphone jack sockets because its producers thought that consumers would often want to listen to music in pairs and not alone. However, consumers rarely did this. They almost always used the Walkman alone, "in a more 'personal', individualistic and less interactive way than was initially imagined" (53). In other words, they resisted the meaning inscribed during production – two headphone jack sockets – and appropriated the device for their own private use.

consumption as appropriation and resistance

However, this theory is as extreme as the production of consumption theory. Whereas the Frankfurt School locates all meaning in production, Certeau locates all meaning in consumption. Moreover, he sees all "consumption practices as inherently democratic and 'subversive',￼" as opposed to the logic of capitalist production (du Gay et al. 98). It is rather obvious that this claim is exaggerated. Consumers can resist the meanings inscribed during production and appropriate a cultural artefact, but they do not necessarily do this all the time. Often enough, they use cultural artefacts exactly as those who produce them have envisioned it. Moreover, not all meaning created during consumption is subversive in the sense that it undermines the meaning created during production. Often it merely complements this meaning. And the meaning created during consumption is definitely not always automatically democratic. (In fact, Certeau's theory has a lot in common with John Fiske's theory of popular culture as folk culture, which I also discuss in chapter 11.)

Certeau locates all meaning in consumption

Accordingly, I would like to follow du Gay and his co-authors who argue that a more useful theorization lies rather in the middle between these two extreme positions:

> [W]hile particular products are inscribed with meaning in their production, they are not the only meanings that those products may come to have. In order to do a cultural study, we must pay attention to the ways in which products are consumed and the meanings that come to be attached to objects through those processes of consumption. (89)

production
and con-
sumption
construct
meaning

Meaning is constructed both during production and consumption, sometimes more during the former, sometimes more during the latter. But it is not enough to consider only one of these processes in a thorough Cultural Studies analysis. One must look at both, if only to decide that in a particular case one is more important than the other.

three diffe-
rent ways of
reading

The three theories of consumption that I have outlined can be linked to three different ways of reading, as defined by Stuart Hall. Reading is, after all, a specific way of consuming texts. And just as we can accept or resist the meaning inscribed in a product during consumption in general, we can accept or resist the meaning inscribed in text – always, of course, in the broad sense outlined in chapter 2 – while we are reading it. Hall distinguishes between the dominant-hegemonic reading, the negotiated reading, and the oppositional reading. The dominant-hegemonic reading (I will finally explain the concept of hegemony in the next chapter) is a reading that follows and accepts the meaning inscribed in a text during production. Note that this is not necessarily the meaning intended by the producer(s) of the text, but the meaning that the text itself highlights – the way in which it wants to be read. A negotiated reading is still fairly similar to a dominant-hegemonic reading. It largely follows the meaning suggested by the text itself but deviates from it in some ways. By contrast, an oppositional reading reads the text against the grain. It resists and rejects the meaning inscribed during production and substitutes it with a very different reading instead.

*Pretty Wo-
man*

All this may sound rather opaque so far. Let me give an example to make clear what it means. The dominant-hegemonic reading of *Pretty Woman* (1990), the film I discussed at the end of the previous chapter, is, rather obviously, that (heterosexual) love conquers everything. It overcomes the class divide and heals the wounds that Edward (Richard Gere) has been suffering from his whole life because his father rejected him when he was a child. This is the meaning inscribed during production, the meaning strongly suggested by the narrative. A negotiated reading could be one that recognizes that the film is a fairy tale. It would acknowledge that love usually does not solve all problems but nevertheless sometimes does. (I am using the subjunctive here because several negotiated readings are possible, and the same goes for the oppositional reading.) As such, it would not fundamentally challenge the major premises of the film's romantic narrative. An oppositional reading, however, would reject the fairy tale narrative outrightly and see it as an imaginary solution to the conflicts produced by capitalism that is only possible in the realm of fiction but without any relevance for the real world. It would thus see the film as the attempt to reconcile its audience with the inequalities caused by capitalism by giving them the hope that love will one day save them. (As I explain in the section on visual culture in chapter 11, the starting point for such an oppositional reading could be the moment when Mr. Morse (Ralph Bellamy) asks Edward why he changed his mind about his company and the film cuts away from the conversation before he can answer.)

Thus far, I have focused on the question of consumption and the construction of meaning. It is now time to add identity to the picture. After all, I have stressed that we

perform our identity through consumption at different points throughout this book already. The relationship between consumption and identity has been most famously theorized by the sociologist Pierre Bourdieu, who I already drew on in the section on class in chapter 6. Bourdieu analyzes consumption as sociocultural differentiation. What he means by that is that different groups – he exclusively focuses on class – consume different goods or the same goods in different ways in order to distinguish themselves from each other and to thus confirm their collective identity. That's why the book in which he develops this theory is called *Distinction* (1979).

consumption as sociocultural differentiation

Bourdieu's theory has strengths and weaknesses. It is very useful because it allows us to understand that we very often consume, that is, buy and use, certain goods to accumulate cultural capital. It also allows us to understand that taste is not something that can be objectively measured and that some people have and others lack. Instead, different groups have different tastes and thus find different things tasteful or at least acceptable because of their desire to distinguish themselves from other groups. However, as du Gay and his colleagues point out, Bourdieu "sees social class as the main determinant of consumer behavior and social status" and neglects other identity categories such as gender, race, or age (92). He also does not consider that different identity categories usually intersect, as we saw in the previous chapter. The most important factor in the consumption of the Walkman, for example, was age and not class. But age intersected with "[g]ender, class and geography" (94). Moreover, Bourdieu's theory is quite static because he regards consumption as always reflecting existing class divisions. He does not consider that practices of consumption can also create collective identities that did not exist before. Accordingly, his theory is very useful, as long as we amend and dynamize it.

strengths and weaknesses

A wonderful example of everything discussed in this chapter so far is Janice Radway's study *Reading the Romance* (1984). In fact, the book could be used to demonstrate how a cultural analysis that follows the circuit of culture looks like, as Radway considers the romance novels themselves and thus representation as well as their production (she devotes a chapter to the publishing houses) and consumption (she does an ethnographic study of the readers of romances using questionnaires and interviews), and links these topics to the identity constructions of the readers. (Only regulation is a topic she hardly touches upon.) This comprehensive perspective allows her to arrive at a nuanced understanding of the meaning of the romance novels for the readers she focuses on.

Radway's Reading the Romance

Romance novels tell stories of – back then exclusively – heterosexual love. They are about a man and a woman who get off on the wrong terms and often even hate each other after their first encounter. Sometimes, the man abuses the woman psychologically or even physically, but at some point in the narrative, he begins to see her worth and starts courting her. At the end of the novel, she agrees to marry him, and it is implied that they live happily ever after. Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice* (1813) can be seen as a precursor of the genre; the *Twilight* (2005-08) and *Fifty Shades of Grey* novels (2011-12) participate in the genre as well.

romance novels

Romance novels are often interpreted by scholars as extremely problematic articulations of patriarchy and heteronormativity, as the narratives suggest that men and women are different by nature, naturally desire each other, and that a woman can only find true happiness in a monogamous relationship with a man to whom she is submissive. Radway's book complicates this understanding. Her analysis of the novels confirms that the narratives push all these ideas, and her ethnographic study of the readers shows that many of them have completely internalized them. However, she also finds that the women frequently take time off from their duties as wives and mothers to read the romances. Thus, the female readers she investigated may not resist the meaning inscribed into these texts during production by producing interpretations that go against the grain of the texts, but they consume these texts in a way that makes the act of reading the romance – hence the title of Radway's book – an act of resistance against the expectations and obligations imposed on them by patriarchal society and its representatives, their own husbands. As Radway puts is:

> Therefore, while the act of romance reading is used by the women as a means of partial protest against the role prescribed for them by the culture, the discourse itself actively insists on the desirability, naturalness, and the benefits of that role by portraying it not as the imposed necessity that it is but as a freely designed, personally controlled, individual choice. (208)

What emerges from Radway's study, then, is an impression of how complex the interplay between production, representation, and consumption, and the construction of identity can be. It pays off to study cultural phenomena closely. Check out Radway's book. It reads very well. I learned a lot from it, and I am sure you would too.

Finally, Cultural Studies is interested in the influence of consumption on production. I mentioned above already that the Walkman originally had two headphone jack sockets, but that users nevertheless listened alone and not together with somebody else, as the producer imagined. What I haven't mentioned yet is that production reacted to this unanticipated consumption. Later models came with only one jack socket. Other products are tested with audiences before they are put on the market to find out what consumers want and what they think of the product. Hollywood films, for example, regularly are test-screened to audiences that are considered representative. And if a majority of the audience does not like the film, it is not unusual that it is reedited, and that scenes are added and deleted. Production and consumption thus often influence each other.

Regulation

We have finally arrived at the last element on the circuit of culture: regulation. Regulation works on two levels. On the one hand, there are laws and official rules. You have to stop at a red light, for example; and during the pandemic, you had to wear masks on trains. If you violated one of these rules and were caught, you could be sanctioned or punished, and you still are if you run over a red light. On the other hand, there are

acts of resis-
tance

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production

unwritten rules, tacit agreements about what a society considers acceptable and not at a certain moment. Such social agreements concern, for example, the amount of intimacy or the voice level acceptable in public. Du Gay and his co-authors call this "cultural regulation" (105). However, both legal and cultural regulation are of interest to Cultural Studies. The unwritten rules are obviously a cultural phenomenon, but so are – if you think about it for just a moment – the official rules. Laws do not come out of thin air; they are the outcome of discussions and negotiations and thus of discourse. Struggles and controversies over regulation are usually struggles about meaning.

<div style="float:right; width:15%;">legal and cultural regulation</div>

The Walkman is a great example to zoom in on such a controversy over meaning because the device cut across the boundary between the private and the public. Despite concerts and similar events, private listening to music was the default mode when the Walkman was invented. One would put on a record or a cassette in one's own four walls. (Of course, this was totally different in the past. Before the invention of record and cassette player, the default mode of listening to music was public: at concerts or other performances.) Listening to music alone was strongly tied by the culture to private space (and I will have more to say about space in chapter 10). The Walkman, however, brought the private consumption of music into the public space. Of course, it could also be used at home, "but it [was] primarily designed and marketed for mobile private listening *in public*" (du Gay et al 106; their italics). It therefore challenged the then existing boundary between the private and the public. Consequently, it was perceived as out of place by many people who observed others using it. For some, it sparked concerns about the detrimental effects on communities such a withdrawal to the private in public might have. Others felt just disturbed by it, especially when somebody listening on a Walkman had turned the volume so high that everybody nearby had to (or could) listen to the music as well.

<div style="float:right; width:15%;">the Walkman</div>

We all know this feeling, don't we? I am writing these paragraphs at the airport of Pisa, Italy, waiting for my flight. I am sitting at the gate next to two teenage girls who are listening to music on a mobile phone. They are not using headphones and are selecting a new song every few seconds, and I have to admit that it is bugging me because I have trouble concentrating. In Germany, I might say something, and ask them to turn it down or sit somewhere else. But my impression is that Italian culture is more accepting than the German one when it comes to noise. A regulatory attempt would therefore feel out of place, and there is clearly no rule that forbids what they are doing.

But even when official regulations or even laws exist, they depend on being reinforced and at least on the silent complicity of the majority of the people affected by them. Just think about the special zones on German trains where you are not allowed to speak on your cellphone. In theory, when somebody does it anyway, another passenger or a train attendant could remind them of the rule, but, as somebody who spends a lot of time on trains, I can tell you that this rarely ever happens. Moreover, and this shows how regulation is often tied to identity – to class, gender, race, or age – not everybody is equally likely to be reminded of the rules. In my experience, a middle-aged businessman

<div style="float:right; width:15%;">regulation is often tied to identity</div>

is far more likely to get away with it than a teenager. Moreover, a colleague told me many years ago how a young man sitting in the row in front of her listened to opera music on his phone without headphones for more than one hour in such a zone without being reprimanded as well. The cultural capital of the disturbance – and opera is usually considered high culture (a concept I discuss in detail in chapter 11) and thus possesses considerable cultural capital – also appears to play a role. My friend, I think, felt she would appear uncultured if she asked him to turn the music off.

the obligations to wear a mask

Let me give you a different example that also concerns trains. (I am by now back in Germany and on the train from Frankfurt to Stuttgart, thus maybe my momentary preference for such examples.) Take the obligation to wear a mask on long-distance trains that was in effect from 2020 to February 2023. For a long time, this rule was very strictly enforced by train attendants and fellow travelers. Anybody whose mask did not cover nose and mouth was likely to be reminded to wear it as required within minutes. In the rare cases where the person without a mask claimed they had a doctor's certificate that freed them from this obligation, other passengers usually shook their heads and mentally filed the person as a Covid conspiracy theorist. (There were, of course, smarter ways to avoid the mask. I remember a man who drank five cans of beer within two hours in order to be able to keep his mask off as he told me when he offered me one.) However, by the fall of 2022 when the dominant discourse on the pandemic had changed and most people considered it to be over, nobody cared anymore. People wore masks that covered only their mouths (or not even that) or no masks at all without being reprimanded by anybody. Regulations are part of complex cultural processes in which meaning is negotiated. As the meaning of the pandemic changed for most people, so did the meaning of the regulation.

the impact of regulation on production and consumption

Just as production and consumption often influence each other, regulation can have an impact on consumption and production, and this topic is of course also of interest to Cultural Studies. The obligation to wear facemasks on trains and in many other public spaces obviously triggered the mass production of such masks – remember they were in short supply in the early stages of the pandemic! – and their corresponding mass consumption. While all masks looked the same initially, a broad variety soon became available. Some of them promised extra safety, thus appealing to people for whom the pandemic carried a particularly grave meaning. Others allowed their wearer to correlate them with their outfits – think of the black or otherwise colored masks! – or their gender such as the pink facemasks I already mentioned in chapter 5.

Hollywood films – to return to this example – have also been regulated for most of that industry's existence, and these regulations have had considerable impact on production and consumption as well as representation. Initially, however, the film industry was not regulated at all, and many films from the 1920s and early 1930s contain graphic depictions of violence and explicitly sexual allusions. As public concern about the industry grew, the studios acted proactively and, as with the transition to sound discussed

above, concertedly. A "Production Code" was drafted, and the studios committed to following its often extremely restricting rules. In order to avoid regulation from outside, the film industry opted for self-regulation.

The Production Code

Have you ever wondered why married couples sleep in twin beds in 1940s films? Because of the Production Code. They could only be shown sharing a bed if all four hands were above the sheets at all times. Regulation did not specify how married couples – and many other things – had to be represented, but it defined how they could *not* be represented. Unable to represent certain things directly, films had to do with allusions or symbolic representations that spoke to an adult audience that could read the codes. When Roger (Cary Grant) pulls Eve (Eva Marie Saint) up onto their compartment bed on a train at the end of Alfred Hitchcock's *North by Northwest* (1959), and the next and final shot of the film shows the long train disappearing into a tunnel, the meaning is rather obvious (but as a kid I missed it completely): The couple finally has sex. In other cases, the avoidance of explicit representation creates ambiguity that cannot be resolved and thus complicates the meaning of the film. Two thirds through *Casablanca* (1941), for example, Ilsa (Ingrid Bergman) and Rick (Humphrey Bogart) finally reconcile. As they kiss, the screen fades to black. A slow fade-in then reveals the tower of Casablanca airport, before the film cuts to Rick who is smoking a cigarette on the balcony and looking at the tower. The next shot then shows Ilsa inside the room, fixing her hair. The strong implication – suggested by the kiss, the passing of time signaled by the fade-out, the phallic symbol of the tower, the rather stereotypical smoking of the cigarette, and the woman tidying up – is that the couple had sex. But we cannot know if this is true, or if they only kissed. It's left to our interpretation.

allusions or symbolic representations

The different degrees of explicitness in *Casablanca* and *North by Northwest* – albeit still on the level of allusion and symbols – can be explained by the eighteen years between them. Over the course of the 1950s, the film industry's Code was increasingly considered obsolete and no longer followed as strictly. It remained officially in place until 1968 but was frequently violated in the last years. The industry reacted with introducing a rating system that – in revised form – exists until today. Under the Production Code, every film was supposed to be suitable for a general audience, that is, for everybody. Under the rating system, different films are considered suitable for different audiences – for everybody, for children of different ages, or only for adults.

rating system

Of course, if fewer people are allowed to watch a film, it will generate less money. Film studios have therefore been taking great care to get the clearance they think is necessary for a film to be successful. This goes in particular for action and science-fiction blockbuster films like *Star Wars* (1977-), *Transformers* (2007-), or *Avatar* (2009, 2022) since the success – and, indeed, the survival – of film studios hinges on popular blockbusters since the late 1970s. And since these films are primarily watched by both teenagers and younger kids, the film studios need to make sure that these groups are allowed to see their films. Until 1984, this meant that the films had to get a PG rating. "PG" stands for "parents' guidance suggested"; it means that it was recommended to parents

PG rating

that they accompany younger children to the movie theater and do not let them watch the film alone. The general consensus was that teenagers could watch these films on their own. Importantly, a PG rating is a recommendation, an unofficial rule and not a legal one. Unlike German parents, Americans can take their children to see any film that is not explicitly rated as only suitable for adults.

However, the PG Rating was severely criticized in 1984 when *Gremlins* and *Indiana Jones and the Temple of Doom* were released because they were perceived by many as too violent for younger children. This raised fears among filmmakers that such films would soon be rated "R," which stands for "Restricted" and means that anybody under seventeen must be accompanied by a parent or guardian. Such a rating would have hurt the commercial success of the films considerably, as teenagers – and this surely hasn't changed – were seen to be less likely to watch films which their parents had to accompany them to. The conundrum was solved by Steven Spielberg, the director of *Indiana Jones* and producer of *Gremlins*. He proposed the introduction of a PG13 rating which would suggest that parents accompany children under thirteen, but that teenagers could watch the film alone. The industry quickly adopted this new category, and the system hasn't been changed since then.

In fact, the PG13 rating is perfectly suited for the success of blockbuster films. Much of the money that these films make since the late 1970s is generated not through movie tickets but through merchandise such as action figures, drawing books, comics, and the like. It is therefore crucial that children watch the films, and it does not do any harm that they watch them with their parents. Not only does this mean that more tickets – to children and parents – get sold. Since most U.S. cinemas are located in malls, the parents can buy their children some merchandise afterwards. And teenagers are still allowed to watch the films without their parents, which is important to them. In fact, we see here the link between regulation and identity quite clearly. Being allowed to watch such a film without a parent or guardian for the first time is one of the ways in which the transition from child to teenager is marked.

Accordingly, all blockbuster productions make sure to get a PG13 rating, and this determines to a large degree what the films can show and how. Nudity is a taboo in American culture, and therefore this is an absolute no-go for a film that wants this rating. At the same time, the culture is less concerned about violence, and as you surely know because you have seen a few (or many) blockbuster films, they are often quite violent. However, the violence is usually quite sterile. People die, but there is very little blood and suffering. Imagine if Quentin Tarantino directed *Star Wars*, as Cultural Studies scholar Henry Jenkins once did! In any case, the example of the rating system shows clearly how regulation influences representation. We have come full circle on the circuit of culture. Its five elements truly influence each other.

PG13 rating

the success of blockbuster films

regulation influences representation

> ## Questions for Self-Study
>
> 1. In 1993, Mattel introduced a new line of Barbie dolls called "Earring Magic Barbie." This included an Earring Magic Ken doll as well. Google it and look at a few images. Which group of consumers had the producers in mind?
> 2. Which other groups consumed and appropriated Earring Magic Ken? Think about it, and then read the article by Dan Savage: https://chicagoreader.com /news-politics/ken-comes-out/
> 3. Today nobody uses a Walkman anymore, but we all have cell phones. What would an analysis of the production, consumption, and regulation of cell phones look like? For parts of this, it might be a good idea to focus on the iPhone.
> 4. What's the equivalent to PG13 in Germany (or another country of your choice)? What are regulators more concerned about, and what is less important to them compared to the United States?

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9 Ideology and Hegemony

We have now completed our tour around the circuit of culture. And you might be asking yourself what's left to say. Why are there three more chapters to read before the conclusion? It's true that you have a solid understanding of Cultural Studies by now. You have learned about many of its key concepts, and, I hope, practiced applying them. And you should have internalized its central tenet – constructionism. But there are a few more concepts that I have not discussed yet that are so central that they need to be covered in an introduction. I also want to introduce you to a couple of additional angles from which we can do Cultural Studies. That's what this and the next two chapters are about.

I begin in this chapter with ideology, a concept that I already mentioned in chapter 6 when I discussed the theories of Karl Marx. I already explained back then that Marx's definition of ideology as false consciousness is problematic because it assumes that one can step out of ideology and shed the false consciousness imposed by the dominant classes. Given what we have learned about discourse and the production of truth, this is obviously not possible. I will therefore focus in the first section of the chapter on theories of ideology that develop Marx's ideas further. They are not directly influenced by Foucault and the constructionist approach to representation because they were developed earlier, but go very well together with them, as they anticipate many of their insights. In the second section of the chapter, I introduce the concept of hegemony, which was developed by Antonio Gramsci to capture how the dominant classes maintain their supremacy over the oppressed ones. This concept is therefore closely related to that of ideology. In fact, from a certain perspective, it can be understood as another attempt to update and correct the classical Marxist understanding of ideology.

Ideology

The classical Marxist idea of ideology as false consciousness is arguably nowhere visualized better than in John Carpenter's sci-fi and horror hybrid *They Live* (1988). The film is about a homeless man (Roddy Piper) – tellingly, he is named Nada, which means "nothing" in Spanish – who comes to Los Angeles looking for a job. It is obviously a time of economic crisis. Many people are homeless, the atmosphere in the city is tense, and the police eye everybody who does not entirely conform to their expectations as a potential troublemaker. One day Nada finds a box with sunglasses in a deserted church. He puts on a pair and suddenly sees the world completely differently. All the color is gone, but more importantly, he sees that some of the people he encounters in the streets or sees in restaurants and shops are aliens from outer space. These aliens impersonate two types of humans: They are either businessmen and thus

those who do well while most people suffer economically, or they are police officers and thus work to control the masses and preserve the status quo.

Importantly, when he wears the glasses, the messages on commercial billboards and in other places also change for Nada. A billboard advertising for a computer system turns into the command "OBEY"; another one that advertises a holiday in the Caribbean with the image of a bikini-clad woman on the beach suddenly turns into "MARRY AND REPRODUCE"; and the covers of the magazines and newspapers at a store carry similar messages. Above them, the slogan "STAY ASLEEP NO THOUGHT" makes even clearer what the promises of consumer goods, exotic places, and sexual gratification are really about: They are ideological tools to pacify the masses and make them complicit in their own exploitation. Nada has stepped out of ideology and moved from false to correct consciousness. He now sees through the guises that the aliens are using to keep their oppressing of humanity a secret. Obviously, the film uses the idea of a secret alien take-over to metaphorically represent class conflict (and I will explain in the section on visual culture in chapter 11 why the film thus involuntarily undermines its own agenda).

However, as we have already established, it is impossible to step out of ideology. It's possible in fiction, but not in the real world. The Marxist conception of ideology as false consciousness – which implies that there is a correct consciousness – remains influential but is not very helpful for Cultural Studies. It makes much more sense to think of ideology as "a systematic body of ideas articulated by a particular group of people" (Storey 2). Such a broader and more neutral definition has the advantage that it does away with the exclusive focus on class conflict, as such a body of ideas can concern gender, sexuality, race, and a million other things just as well. Like the classical Marxist understanding of ideology, such a theory of ideology considers representations of all kinds as important factors in spreading ideology because such "'ideological forms' […] always present a particular image of the world" (Storey 4; the phrase "ideological form" comes from Marx and is quoted by Storey). However, whereas classical Marxism sees representations as part of the cultural superstructure and thus as always merely reflecting the economic base (I discussed the base/superstructure model in chapter 6.), this broader definition is reconcilable with one of Cultural Studies's central insights: Representations matter. They shape our understanding of the world because there is no meaning without representation.

Importantly, ideology is not only expressed in texts. It is also – and this is a dimension Marx hardly ever touches upon – a "material practice." This means that it is enacted in "certain rituals and customs [that] have the effect of binding us to the social order" (Storey 4, 5). For example, my sons love the small shopping carts available for kids in many supermarkets. Whenever we go shopping together, we need to get one for each of them. My relationship with the carts is more ambivalent. In one sense, they are really handy. They keep my kids busy and happy and give me the opportunity to focus on the shopping. But maybe I should say they gave me the opportunity because now that

stepping out of ideology

ideology as a systematic body of ideas

ideology as material practice

my sons are older, they race with the carts through the store – and I often run after them, trying to make sure they don't bump into anybody. Moreover, as a Cultural Studies scholar I am aware of their larger function. Not only are they designed to make sure that the parents spend more time in the store and thus usually also more money. They also suggest to children that shopping is fun, a game that should not be left to grown-ups alone. Thus, they are, quite playfully, bound to the social order of contemporary capitalism. They are turned into consumers before they are out of diapers.

This conception of ideology as practice has been most thoroughly theorized by Louis Althusser, a French philosopher, who is best described as a post-Marxist because he was much concerned with updating classical Marxist ideas. Among other things, he provided a new definition of ideology that updates Marx's understanding in a way that is a bit more concrete than the understanding of ideology as a systematic body of ideas we have worked with in the last paragraphs. For Althusser, "[i]deology represents the imaginary relationship of individuals to their real conditions of existence" (109). This definition, which admittedly looks rather opaque at first sight, has two important and related implications. First of all, according to Althusser, ideology always entails a misconception or distortion of reality. The way people understand the world is always "imaginary." We never see the world how it really is. Second, we can only ever step from one ideology into another one, from one misconception into the next one, but never out of ideology. Our relationship to the world will always be imaginary.

a new definition of ideology

Althusser's definition of ideology is very well suited for Cultural Studies. As you will have noticed immediately, the way he defines ideology echoes what I said about representation and discourse in the early chapters of the book: There is no meaning outside of representation, and no truth outside of discourse. Let me repeat what I said in chapter 2 when I discussed the implications of the constructionist approach to representation: Representations link us to the world, enabling us to make sense of it and communicate about it, but, at the same time, they also separate us from the world, because we never see the world for what it is. Where Althusser's definition of ideology differs from the constructionist theory of representation is that the latter is very general whereas he is concerned far more concretely with the effect ideology has on maintaining class hierarchies and the status quo.

well suited for Cultural Studies

In this context, Althusser coins two important concepts to understand how the dominant classes use ideology to maintain their control over the oppressed classes. The first of these is interpellation. According to Althusser, "all ideology hails or interpellates concrete individuals as concrete subjects" (117). What he means by this is that there is a moment – or rather moments – at which individuals come under the influence of ideology. At this moment, he argues, individuals are not only exposed to ideology, but they also accept and internalize the ideas that make up a specific ideology. This transforms individuals – in the sense of independent beings – into subjects – into beings that submit to an ideology and thus to the people or the institution that puts it out

interpellation

there. (As we saw in chapter 4, Foucault also spoke about the subjects of discourses to express the power relationship involved.)

Althusser's famous example is a policeman calling out to a passerby in the street. If the person stops and turns to the policeman, they acknowledge the authority of the policeman, who is a representative of the state and thus of the existing order. As they accept their subordinate position, they are turned from an individual into a subject. Importantly, this example is theoretical and not realistic. It is rather unlikely that an adult walking in the street would have escaped ideology for that long in their life. Thus, we rather have to understand interpellation as a constant re-interpellation, a continuously repeated process that binds us to the social order and again and again reconfirms our status as subjects. Each time my sons take one of the shopping carts designed for kids they are re-interpellated as future consumers and subjects to the logic of capitalism.

But there are specific moments at which interpellation reaches a new level or takes a new turn. Think, for example, of the famous U.S. Army recruiting poster used both in World War I and World War II. It shows an old man with a top hat who is dressed in the colors of the U.S. national flag. This is Uncle Sam, the allegorical representation of the United States. He looks out of the picture and thus directly at anybody who looks at it and points his finger at them. The writing at the bottom of the poster says in big letters: "I want you for U.S. Army." (Google it to get a better idea of its effect.) Obviously, the point of the poster is to make some of those who see it enlist in the army. It thus targets people who consider themselves patriotic Americans already, suggesting to them that now the time for a special commitment has come. By looking at the poster, they are interpellated as potential recruits.

We can also usefully apply the concept of interpellation to the reaping scene in *The Hunger Games*. I have discussed this scene before in the context of the internal production of identity in chapter 5. Althusser's theory enables us to understand even better what happens to Katniss there. Katniss is, of course, a subject of the Capitol already when she participates in the reaping. After all, she has been living in District 12 all her life and has been part of the lottery to choose tributes for several years. But one could argue that she has so far not internalized the ideology of the Capitol; she has participated in the reaping and other events passively, but not actively. She has been physically present, but not emotionally committed. This changes when her sister's name is drawn, and she volunteers to take her place. At first, she leaves the line where she has been ordered to stand to get to her sister, but two Peacekeepers restrain her almost immediately. That's when she realizes that the only way to save her sister is to take her place voluntarily. As she cries out, "I volunteer!" she fully accepts the authority of the Capitol and the logic of the reaping. She becomes an active participant who plays the Capitol's game.

The second concept – or rather concepts – of Althusser I want to introduce can also be fruitfully applied to the reaping scene and indeed the institution of the Hunger

Games as a whole. Althusser distinguishes between the repressive state apparatus and the ideological state apparatuses. The repressive state apparatus (often abridged as RSA) comprises the police, the army, but also the prison system; the ideological state apparatuses (often abridged as ISA) comprise the school, the church, the family, or the media: "the Repressive State Apparatus functions 'by violence', whereas the Ideological State Apparatuses *function 'by ideology'*" (97; his italics). Althusser speaks of the RSA in the singular because its parts all function similarly: The dominant class uses force to impose its will. And he speaks of the ISA in the plural because the parts function differently in spreading the ideology of the dominant class. Importantly, Althusser stresses that

> the (Repressive) State Apparatus functions massively and predominantly *by repression* (including physical repression), while functioning secondary by ideology. [...] [T]he Ideological State Apparatuses function massively and predominantly *by ideology*, but they also function secondarily by repression. (97; his italics)

Ideology thus plays a role in the RSA, but is less important than force. By the same token, force and repression are exerted in the ISA as well but are not as important to their functioning as ideology. But in both cases, a combination of ideology and repression is at work.

The institution of the Hunger Games in Collins's novels and the films based on them is particularly interesting because it can be seen as part of both the repressive state apparatus and the ideological state apparatuses. For the inhabitants of the districts, the Hunger Games is part of the repressive state apparatus. It is a means of oppression that reminds them of the absolute power the Capitol has over them. It sends their children to die in a televised event, and there is nothing they can do about it. However, what I said about interpellation above and about the propaganda film shown at the reaping in chapter 5 already shows that the Capitol also uses the Games to spread its ideology in the districts. But that's only the secondary goal. By contrast, for the inhabitants of the Capitol, the institution of the Hunger Games is part of the ideological state apparatuses. On the one hand, it is part of a propaganda effort by those in power – President Snow and his inner circle – to remind the people of the Capitol of the rebellion of the districts more than 70 years ago, keeping the memory of the event alive. (Memory is a topic I address in the next chapter.) It suggests that the Capitol's dominance over the districts is necessary to keep the peace and thus beneficial to all. At the same time, the Games function as entertainment, keeping the people happy and suggesting to them that they should leave politics to their leaders.

On the whole, then, Althusser's theory entails not only an understanding of ideology that is better suited for Cultural Studies than the classical Marxist one. It also comprises a number of related concepts that allow a nuanced understanding of how the dominant class maintains its superiority. What is more, these concepts can be productively applied to phenomena, practices, and representations, that is, everything that Cultural

Althusser's
traditional
Marxism

Studies is interested in. However, Althusser remains a traditional Marxist in that he sees social conflict exclusively as class conflict. Moreover, his theory of how ideology and repression work is still one-sided. He does not consider how the dominant class reacts to oppressed classes, which appear very passive. But as we have seen in our discussion of Foucault in chapter 4, power circulates, and nobody is entirely without it for good. It is therefore time to consider another theory that takes these aspects better into account: the theory of hegemony.

Hegemony

The theory of hegemony was developed by the Italian Marxist philosopher Antonio Gramsci. He was most interested in the question why the socialist revolutions that Marx had predicted as inevitable in the middle of the 19th century had not yet occurred in most countries by the 1920s. The theory of hegemony, developed in short pieces of writing while he was imprisoned by the fascist government of Benito Mussolini, is his answer to this question. It is closely related to Althusser's theories in that it also stresses the combination of force and ideology. But whereas Althusser conceptually separates these two dimensions into the repressive state apparatus (which primarily operates by force) and the ideological state apparatuses (which primarily operate by ideology), Gramsci's concept of hegemony comprises both dimensions. As he puts it, "the supremacy of a social group manifests itself in two ways, as 'domination' and as 'intellectual and moral leadership'" (57-58).

the combi-
nation of
force and
ideology

Unlike Althusser, however, Gramsci puts more emphasis on ideological leadership than the use of force. His answer to the question why the socialist revolutions have mostly failed to materialize is the ability of the dominant class to present its position as common sense and favorable to all. In other words, according to Gramsci, the effect of ideology is not so much that it keeps the oppressed masses passive and pacified. Rather, it turns them into active supporters of measures and policies that run against their own interests. This is a key insight that can be usefully applied not only to the societies of the 19th century but also to contemporary democratic political systems. It explains the otherwise often puzzling mass appeal of parties whose agenda is quite harmful to working-class voters.

common
sense

Since I have throughout this book repeatedly referred to the representation of class in 1980s cinema, let me use an example from that decade, which was characterized in the United States and the United Kingdom by growing inequality. The neoliberal governments of Ronald Reagan in the U.S. and Margaret Thatcher in the U.K. cut back on social welfare and especially on taxes for the richest people in society. This unjust distribution of burdens enjoyed considerable support in both countries for a while, even among people who did not benefit from these measures at all but were worse off because of them. But their support was won through the idea of trickle-down economics. This economic theory, which was controversial back then already and has been completely dismissed since, claimed that benefits given to the richest people in society would

trickle-down
economics

eventually benefit everybody. If the rich paid less taxes, they would have more money to spend and to invest, and the effects would "trickle down" the social ladder. Many people were thus convinced to vote for and support policies that contributed to their own exploitation.

Importantly, Gramsci also stresses that those in power occasionally need to compromise in order to maintain their superiority. This insight anticipates to a certain degree Foucault's claim that nobody is entirely without power. The supremacy of the dominant class is not fixed and secure at all times, but often very fragile. One strategy of the dominant class to remain in power is therefore to give in on certain pressing issues to prevent a general uprising and complete loss of power. Think, for example, of the end of *The Hunger Games*. After Katniss and Peeta have killed the last tribute from another district, the Gamemakers take back the previously announced change in rules that allows two winners as long as they come from the same district. Obviously, they want Katniss and Peeta to fight each other to destroy any sense of alliance among them and thus, by extension, also among the people in the districts more generally. However, when Katniss and Peeta threaten to commit suicide together by eating poisonous berries, thus raising the prospect of the Games ending without a winner, the rule change is once again reinstated. The Capitol needs a winner and cannot afford the display of solidarity and love a joint suicide would mean. It would have a negative impact on the ideological message to the people in the Capitol and might even spark an uprising in the districts.

the Chinese Covid strategy

Much the same fear made the Chinese government completely reverse its Covid strategy in December 2022. Until then, China had one of the most restrictive Covid regimes in the world. Entire cities were still put into lockdown to contain the virus there in 2022 despite the widespread availability of vaccines. In most of the rest of the world, such measures were by then unnecessary because of vaccinations. And they would also have been impossible to impose, as the population would not have accepted such restrictions anymore. In China, the situation was different. The authoritarian regime could impose much stricter rules than democratic countries, and it continued to do so because it sought to uphold its ideology that it knew best how to deal with the pandemic. In November 2022, however, as infection numbers rose and restrictions were tightened again in many cities, the people began to take to the streets. When it became clear that the protests could not be quickly contained by the use of force, the government obviously grew afraid that the anti-lockdown protests could spark a general uprising. Consequently, it compromised. Within a few weeks, all restrictions were lifted, and state media began to disseminate the narrative that the pandemic was over. Hegemony, then, as John Storey puts it very clearly, is "never simply power imposed from above: it is always the result of 'negotiations' between dominant and subordinate groups" (81).

However, if the shift in policy had not been enough to contain the protests, if the protestors had challenged the general distribution of power in China, the regime would

compromise

coercion

without doubt have used force. Gramsci was well aware that the dominant class would also use coercion, that is, violence, to defend its supremacy. Thus, the fast and, especially when compared to other protests, excessive use of force against the Occupy Wall Street protest movement, which formed in the wake of the Great Recession of 2008-09 and demanded a better control of the financial markets and measures against economic inequality, can be explained by the fact that this movement had a clear ideology of its own that was irreconcilable with the dominant ideology. It was therefore impossible to sell its members exploitation and discrimination as common sense. The protesters were also not inclined to accept compromises of any sort. As they constituted a threat to the dominant capitalist order, even in a democratic state like the United States authorities quickly resorted to the use of force and broke up protests in different cities.

incorpora-
tion

However, coercion is usually the last resort of the dominant class, according to Gramsci. Very often, potential conflicts are also contained by the incorporation of subversive and resistant movements and cultural forms into the dominant order. In an excellent article, John Storey has applied Gramsci's theory to West Coast rock music. Storey shows how this music developed in the late 1960s in opposition to the war the United States was waging in Vietnam. West Coast rock was highly critical of the government and of capitalism, which it regarded as the driving force behind the war. However, no matter how critical the artists were of capitalism, they couldn't escape its thrall. In fact, as the music became more popular, the artists' distance to the capitalist system grew smaller instead of bigger: "The problem was this: in order to make records musicians, however alternative, have to engage with capitalism in the form of the private ownership of the industry. If you want to continue making records, you have to continue making profits" (28). Paradoxically, therefore, "the proliferation of Jefferson Airplane's [a famous band at the time] anti-capitalist politics increased the profits of their capitalist record company" (29).

*The Hunger
Games*

Much the same is true about *The Hunger Games*. Both the novels and the films are highly critical of economic inequality and the capitalist system that produces it. The conflict between the Capitol and the districts can be read as symbolically representing the conflict between different classes in the United States or between the rich Global North and the poor Global South, which is exploited by the former. (I will have more to say about the contrast between these spaces in the next chapter.) But at the same time, the novels and the films are completely incorporated into the capitalist system. The books have sold more than 100 million copies, and the films have made more than a billion dollars at the box office. *The Hunger Games* thus criticizes capitalism while working to maintain it at the same time. It's inextricably entangled in the phenomenon that it condemns.

the place of
Marxist the-
ories

Fascinatingly, we can also use Gramsci's theory to better understand the place of Marxist theories in general and thus also of the theory of hegemony in contemporary capitalist society. It is not forbidden to talk about these theories, and they are taught at university (and discussed in textbooks like the one you are reading right now). But

their place in the educational system is restricted to the humanities and parts of the social sciences. Importantly, they are not taught where it really matters, that is, in Economics departments. The University of Tübingen has a B.A. program in International Economics. Each winter, some of the students enrolled in this program attend the lecture on which this book is based. It is there that they come for the first (and usually only) time into contact with Marxist theories. These theories, then, we could say, are safely incorporated into the logic of the contemporary neoliberal university. The compromise is that they can be used to voice criticism of capitalism – but only in departments that don't really matter for the economic order.

In this regard, one of the strengths of the theory of hegemony is also a bit of a weakness. As we saw in chapter 6 already where I discussed the concepts of hegemonic masculinity and femininity, Gramsci's theory has been productively used to talk not only about class conflict but about a whole array of different topics such as gender roles. (That's why Storey talks about "groups" in the passage above and not about "classes.") One of Foucault's criticisms of classical Marxism was that it reduced all conflict to matters of class and disregarded all other factors, thus painting a very reductionist picture of the world (Hall 32-33). Gramsci's theory escapes this one-sidedness. It is also more dynamic than the classical Marxist concept of ideology, and its focus on compromise and incorporation makes it more compatible with Foucault's theories of discourse and power than Althusser's theory of the ideological state apparatuses and the repressive state apparatus, to which it is otherwise closely related. The flipside of this is, however, that the concept has to a certain degree been severed from its Marxist roots. This is no problem as far as the usefulness of concepts such as hegemonic masculinity is concerned. But it is telling with regard to the cultural status of Marxist theories.

hegemony beyond Marxism

Questions for Self-Study

1. Apply Althusser's concepts – interpellation, repressive state apparatus, and ideological state apparatuses – to Germany's (or any other country's) handling of the coronavirus pandemic.
2. What changes if you apply Gramsci's theory of hegemony?
3. Are there other moments in *The Hunger Games* that we also understand better if we draw on Althusser and/or Gramsci?
4. Can you think of other cultural phenomena that have undergone a process of incorporation?

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10 Memory and Space

In this chapter I introduce two concepts that are absolutely central to Cultural Studies but that I have barely even mentioned so far: memory and space. I begin with memory and will show that it is closely tied to identity. Who we are as individuals and collectives is inextricably connected to what we remember and how we remember it, to the stories that we tell about our past. Accordingly, memory is also linked to representation and especially to narrative. The narrative templates we have available to make sense of past experiences shape our memory and therefore also our identity. Memory is even related to space, and I explore this connection by way of an example at the end of the second section of this chapter. Before that, however, I use that section to introduce the concept of space more generally. I discuss how space is related to the different elements on the circuit of culture, explain the often-made distinction between space and place, and introduce a number of binary oppositions that many cultures use to make sense of space and hierarchize different types of it. Throughout the chapter, I stress that both memory and space are constructed, but, at this point in the book, none of you will be surprised by that.

memory and space are constructed

Memory

Just as we distinguished in chapter 5 between individual and collective identity, we can distinguish between individual and collective memory. Cultural Studies is usually more interested in the latter, and I will focus on it as well. But let's begin with individual memory.

individual memory

Memory studies, a field that has grown a lot in the past three decades, knows three types of individual memory: semantic memory, procedural memory, and episodic memory. Semantic memory refers to the facts that you know. I know that after all I have said about truth and discourse in previous chapters, you know that facts can be a tricky thing, but we are talking about a very basic level here. Knowing that Paris is the capital of France, that the U.S. flag shows stars and stripes, or that you need to win six games to win a set of tennis are part of your semantic memory. It doesn't matter which discourse you are in; once you have memorized them, these facts will remain the same. They are fixed and will only change if the French decide to rename their capital, if the United States ceases to exist, or if the rules of tennis are changed.

Semantic memory

By contrast, procedural memory does not follow the formula of "I know that …" (Paris is the capital of France, for example) but refers to knowing how to do something: riding a bike, tying your shoelaces, or playing tennis. Procedural memory is tied to our bodies; you can also think about it as muscle memory because it is often the case that our bodies know how to do certain things, that is, they remember how to do certain things, but that we cannot consciously conceptualize and verbalize this knowledge. I am sure you

procedural memory

know how to tie your shoelaces, but could you explain it to somebody without demonstrating it at the same time? At least for me, showing them how to do it would be much easier. That's also why we need training when it comes to these things. You can watch hundreds of YouTube videos that explain to you how to ride a bike, but when you try it for the first time you will nevertheless land on your butt. We need to practice. But once we have learned these things, our bodies never completely forget them. I once did not play tennis for five years and when I started again, I was not playing nearly as well as before the break. But I was not at the beginner's level again, and the skills came back to me quickly. I also haven't ridden a bike in nearly ten years, but if I left the Historical Reading Room right now and got onto one, I would be able to ride to the building where my office is without problems.

Semantic and procedural memory are fascinating topics, but Cultural Studies is not really interested in them. Cultural Studies is of course interested in practices like riding a bike or playing tennis, but not in the type of memory that allows us to do these things. Rather, it investigates what these cultural practices mean in different cultures at different historical moments. When it comes to individual memory, the only type that Cultural Studies cares about is episodic memory. Episodic memory concerns moments from our past that we remember in the present because they are important for who we are – for our identity. This type of memory is called episodic memory because we do not remember our whole lives but only certain episodes that are important for our self-understanding.

It will not surprise you at all that episodic memory is constructed. On the one hand, it is constructed because it depends on representation in general and on narrative in particular. Even when we remember episodes from our past only in our mind and do not share them with anybody, we construct little stories in our heads. And as we all know, the meaning of our memories is therefore shaped by the language that we speak and the narrative templates that are available in our culture. Moreover, our autobiographical memories are shaped by our perspective in the present. Therefore, they can change considerably over time. When we are in a happy relationship, we remember the beginning of that relationship much differently than after a break-up. And when we have just been separated and are still angry or grieving, we remember that relationship differently than ten years later when we have more distance and maybe even look back fondly on it. The point is that we constantly rewrite our memory according to the needs of the present. There is no correct memory of a past relationship (or whatever else) that we can unearth if we only try hard enough. Memory is always constructed.

Remembering can be a conscious action or happen unconsciously to us and even against our will. We can sit down and write our life stories or tell a friend we haven't seen in a week, a month, or a year how we have been. But memory can also overcome us, and many different things can be triggers of memory. When Peeta is chosen as the male tribute at the reaping and Katniss sees him, this triggers her memory of how she first

episodic memory

the construction of episodic memory

triggers of memory

saw him years ago. (It takes her some time to realize that he intentionally left food for her back then.) In Marcel Proust's famous series of modernist novels *In Search of Lost Time* (1913-1927), the narrator's memory is triggered when he dips a madeleine – a French pastry – into a cup of lime blossom tea. The distinct smell takes him back to his childhood and he begins to remember things, and then writes down what happened to him. Music can have the same effect. Whenever I hear Andreas Bourani's song "Auf uns" (2014) ("To us"), I smile, and my mood improves. It's not because of the song itself, which is not very good, I think, but because it makes me remember Germany winning the 2014 World Cup. But of course, the most important triggers of memory in contemporary culture are photographs. We often value photos not for their aesthetic qualities but because of the memories of people, places, and events that they evoke when we look at them.

Traumatic memory is a special kind of involuntary memory. "Trauma" is a term that has Greek roots and originally means "wound." A traumatic memory thus is a memory of an episode (or episodes) in our life when we were psychologically or physically wounded. It can be connected to an accident or any kind of assault or harassment and be triggered by specific situations or words, but also by colors, smell, or music. Remembering the traumatic episode(s) can metaphorically reopen the wound. For those experiencing it, traumatic memory is particularly painful and challenging because it cannot be controlled through narrative. As we saw in chapter 4, narratives are a way to make sense of experience and thus to control it and fix its meaning. Traumatic memory resists such narrativization and therefore disrupts autobiographical accounts and challenges our internally produced identity. (I discussed how identity is internally but also externally produced in chapter 5.) Accordingly, an important way to help those suffering from traumatic memories is therapy that enables them to control their traumatic memories by making them part of a coherent autobiographical narrative.

traumatic memory

Much more could be said about traumatic memory in particular and individual memory more generally, but let's move on to collective memory. Following the German Egyptologist Jan Assmann, many scholars in Cultural Studies and related fields and disciplines distinguish between two forms of collective memory: communicative memory and cultural memory. I find this distinction very useful and adopt it in this chapter. Both communicative and cultural memory are important for constructing and maintaining collective identities of all kinds.

collective memory

Communicative memory is, as the term already implies, the memory that people share collectively when they talk about events of the past that affected – and maybe continue to affect – them as a group. For example, a year before I moved to Tübingen, the town was hit by an enormous hailstorm that destroyed countless gardens, cars, and other things. The memory of this storm is still very much alive in the community. It is frequently talked about, and of course always comes up when a thunderstorm is approaching. As I said, I did not yet live in Tübingen when that storm occurred, but I have heard so many stories about it (and even passed some of them on) that I sometimes

communicative memory

feel as if I had experienced the storm myself. The event is part of the communicative memory of Tübingen and contributes to the collective identity of its citizens. But there is no special day or event to commemorate the hailstorm. (It was bad, but not that bad.) This is quite characteristic of communicative memory which thrives and depends on everyday interactions. It is not formalized or ritualized in any ways. There are no cultural representations of any kind that deal with this memory.

By contrast, what Assmann calls cultural memory is highly formalized. It depends on rites and rituals, and on special days, events, and institutions devoted to commemorating particular events from the past. Moreover, whereas communicative memory is egalitarian – everybody who was in Tübingen that day can equally contribute to the memory of the storm (and even those like me who weren't there can do their part) –, cultural memory depends on specialists whose job it is to preserve the memory and to inform the community on those special occasions about its meaning. Depending on the culture and its regime of truth – a concept I introduced in my discussion of discourse in chapter 3 – these specialists can be "shamans, bards, and griots, as well as priests, teachers, artists, clerks, scholars, mandarins, rabbis, [or] mullahs" (Assmann 114).

Importantly, there is a crucial difference between oral and literate societies when it comes to the relationship between communicative and cultural memory. In oral societies, for example, certain Indigenous societies, communicative memory concerns only the recent past. It spans about three generations or 80 years – roughly the lifespan, that is, of somebody who gets old enough to meet and talk to their grandchildren. Assmann draws on the research of Jan Vansina, an ethnologist, who observed that the oral societies he studied had barely any memory of events beyond that generational threshold. However, they had a very detailed cultural memory of the ancient past of their community because there were stories about the founding of the community and rituals to commemorate it. Vansina called this gap between the recent and the ancient past, a gap that corresponds to the difference between communicative and cultural memory, the "floating gap" (Assmann 112). However, "expanding gap" might be a more accurate term because, as time passes, and communicative memory changes, the gap increases. It does not so much float as get bigger.

In literate societies, that is, societies in which at least a part of the population can read and write, writing and archives allow to preserve memories of the past beyond the 80-year threshold. One can even draw on these written sources to communicate about the past informally. Thus, the cultural memory of these societies is usually much larger, as it can encompass not only the distant past, but often also the whole history of that society up to the present. Even events that occurred very recently can become part of cultural memory. Just think of the events that marked the first anniversary of the Russian attack on Ukraine. Thus, while there are certain events that figure more or less exclusively in communicative memory or cultural memory, the two overlap to a large degree in literate societies. Accordingly, in these societies, the floating gap has disap-

cultural memory

oral societies

literate societies

peared, or, in other words, the expanding gap of oral societies has shrunk away completely.

Let's return for the final time to the reaping scene in *The Hunger Games* to see how memory is institutionalized and ritualized and thus turned into cultural memory. In fact, the Hunger Games – from the reaping to the interview with the winner(s) – are a ritual to commemorate the war between the Capitol and the districts. This dimension is implicit in all parts of the Games, but it comes most explicitly to the fore at the reaping where a short film, narrated by President Snow in the movie, is shown that explains why the Games exist in the first place. Of course, the propaganda film presents the extremely biased position of the Capitol on the conflict, depicting the Capitol as caring and forgiving and the districts as ungrateful. It is an attempt to fix the memory of – with Foucault we would say the truth about – the war. Significantly, the novel and the film depict the 74th annual Hunger Games. The war will thus very soon be beyond the 80-year threshold of communicative memory. This is important because the districts function to a large degree like oral societies. The children receive some schooling but only of the kind necessary for the forced labor the Capitol has them do. Many of them can't read or write properly, and texts that depict the district's perspective on the war – depicting it as the justified and necessary uprising against the tyrannical Capitol – do not exist anyway. Thus, the informal, everyday memory of the war that keeps this narrative alive will soon disappear. It cannot be transformed into cultural memory because the Capitol prevents this. A few years into the future, only the memory of the Capitol would have existed. But the rebellion triggered by Katniss prevents this from happening.

the reaping scene

Let's turn to an example from the real world: the memory of World War II in the United States. In the country's cultural memory, World War II figures as "the best war ever," as historian Michael Adams once put it. Whereas the role the U.S. played in subsequent conflicts – from Korea via Vietnam to Iraq and Afghanistan – has always been controversial both within the country and outside of it, most Americans (and many others, me included) see the involvement of the United States in World War II as overall positive. It played a crucial role in defeating fascism and restoring democracy. The memory of the conflict is an integral part of American national identity; it confirms the narrative of the United States as a nation that is not only exceptional but beneficial for the rest of the world.

the memory of World War II in the United States

Importantly, this memory did not spontaneously emerge; nor has it been as consciously manufactured as the memory of the past war in *The Hunger Games*. It depends on representations and rituals. Countless Hollywood films like *The Longest Day* (1962) and *Saving Private Ryan* (1998) and books such as Herman Wouk's *War and Remembrance* (1978) and Tom Brokaw's *The Greatest Generation* (1998) have produced and then reproduced this memory. It is ritualized in the events that mark the anniversaries of important moments in the war, "objectified" in the National World War II Memorial in Washington, DC (opened in 2004), and maintained through countless speeches, articles,

representations and rituals

and exhibitions. Importantly, everything that could challenge the positive image of the United States – such as the deployment of nuclear bombs against Japan, which has been controversially discussed by historians – usually does not figure in the cultural memory of the conflict.

Just as the memory of the war favored by the Capitol in *The Hunger Games*, the memory of World War II in the United States has been determined by the needs of the present. On the one hand, the memory has served to legitimate the global dominance that the United States assumed after 1945 and especially after the end of the Cold War in the 1990s. U.S. dominance is projected as the much better alternative to Nazi rule. (And who would disagree?) On the other, the memory has served the purpose of legitimating the role of the United States in other wars, especially after the Vietnam War challenged the positive self-image of the country. We were on the right side in World War II, this (flawed) logic goes, therefore we are on the right side in this new conflict, too, and as in the 1940s our goal is to promote democracy, liberty, and justice.

Frequently, the new conflicts are even represented as repetitions or continuations of World War II. During the early 2000s, for example, when there was a need to justify the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, Saddam Hussein, the president of Iraq, and Osama bin Laden, the mastermind behind the terrorist attacks of 9/11, were frequently compared to Hitler. On March 10, 2003, the conservative journalist Bill O'Reilly claimed in an article for the *New York Daily News* that "Saddam's just Hitler with a bigger mustache." O'Reilly took on the millions who were against an invasion of Iraq, comparing their position to those who were against the U.S. entering the war against Nazi Germany in the 1930s and 1940s. Suggesting that the stakes now were as high as back then and the roles of good and evil as clear, O'Reilly used the accepted cultural memory of World War II to influence public opinion in favor of war against Iraq, which then began a few days later.

Space

When I first taught the lecture "Introduction to Cultural Studies" at the University of Freiburg more than a decade ago, I sent the students outside to experience and investigate the space around the university buildings. At the University of Tübingen, I don't do this any longer because by now I always cover space in one lecture together with memory and there is no time for even such a short fieldwork trip. However, I usually invite students to brainstorm in small groups about space and to connect it to some of the concepts that we have covered over the course of the semester. At this point in the class, the task is not particularly challenging, and most groups are quick to point out

that space is a central category of human experience because we all exist in space. We have bodies that occupy a specific space at any given moment, and we often move from one space to another.

Students also mention very quickly that different spaces carry different meanings, but that the meanings of space are constructed. They are not inherent in the different spaces themselves but are produced by representations and practices. In fact, the students usually conclude without any prompting from me that space is closely connected to all five elements on the circuit of culture and many more concepts that are central to Cultural Studies. I am sure that you would have come to the same conclusion, had I given you time to think about the question. After all, I have referred to space at various moments throughout this book already. In chapter 2, for example, I discussed how the language we speak may affect our orientation in space; in chapter 8, I reported how the use of the Walkman caused discussions about appropriate behavior in public; and at various moments I mentioned that space is – like culture in general – often organized along binary oppositions such as the distinction between private and public space.

the meanings of space are constructed

Let's be a bit more systematic now. To begin with, space and representation are connected. What different spaces mean is produced by discourse, which, after all, as we saw in chapter 4, comprises both representation and practice. During the pandemic, for example, the dominant discourse (I said a lot about that in chapter 4, too) changed the meaning that different spaces had before we faced the coronavirus. Inside suddenly became a place that was considered more dangerous than outside. It also became a space where certain regulations (such as wearing facemasks) applied that did not apply outside. And for many people, the private space of the home also became a workspace – a development perfectly captured by the suddenly ubiquitous popular term "home office." Through Zoom and similar tools, colleagues who we would never invite to our home, entered our living room or – if the internet connection was best there – even our bedroom. What is more, our ideas about all kinds of spaces are shaped by representations. Most of you, I guess, have never been to an American high school but nearly all of you have some idea of what kind of space that is (and which smaller spaces such as the gym, the cafeteria, the library etc. it comprises) because you have watched films and TV shows set in American high schools. Maybe you even had an idea what kind of space a university is before you enrolled because of cultural representations. And if these were American films and shows you were probably disappointed by how worn down and shabby German universities are in comparison.

space and representation

Unsurprisingly, space is also related to production and consumption. Modern cultures designate specific spaces for each of these processes. Spaces of production are usually more strictly separated from other spaces, especially when industrial production and thus factories are concerned. Production on a smaller scale can of course also happen in other spaces, for instance, in the home. A former neighbor of mine who is good at sewing is now selling cushions and other accessories that she produces in her living room. She has thus effectively transformed a formerly private space into a hybrid one. The meaning of the living room for her and her family has changed.

spaces of production

Spaces of consumption are clearly demarcated in some cases; in others, they are less clearly defined. The theater, the opera, or the cinema are spaces that have been designed

spaces of consumption

for the collective consumption of certain forms of culture. The same goes for libraries (where you can not only borrow but actually read books), but also for amusement parks, or sports arenas where you can watch amateur or professional athletes. At the same time, consumption can also occur in other places, both private and public. The modern home is of course usually equipped for all kinds of consumption. You can watch a movie, read a book, or listen to the recording of an opera there. Of course, the meaning of consumption changes according to the space where it takes place. It makes a difference if you watch the live performance of an opera together with other people, or if you watch a recording alone in your living room. In fact, the space of consumption has an impact on the meaning of the product that is consumed. (Remember what we learned about consumption in chapter 8.) As one of my professors once pointed out, it makes a difference if you watch Wong Kar-Wai's critically acclaimed *In the Mood for Love* (2000) in an art cinema on a big screen, with your date on the couch on the TV, or in bed on your laptop. In the first case, the film might be predominantly consumed as an art film, in the second as a romantic comedy, and in the third maybe as a soft porn.

Of course, for quite some time now, portable devices like cell phones, tablets, and earlier the Walkman have made it possible to listen to music or watch movies wherever we are. As we saw in chapter 8 where I talked about the Walkman, this has led to discussions about the appropriate use of such devices in public spaces. By now, these discussions have decreased, but the pandemic triggered other discussions about the wearing of masks, the appropriate distance to other people, and similar issues. This shows that space and regulation are particularly closely connected. All spaces are legally (through official rules or even laws) or culturally (through social agreements) regulated, as I explained in detail in chapter 8. Just a moment ago I was annoyed because people were talking in the library! (I think there should be a law against that…) And as with everything that we have discussed in this book, these regulations are often culturally specific. When I studied in the U.S., I could take coffee and pastries and once even a pizza with me into the library; here in Tübingen, only water is allowed.

Finally, space and identity are of course also connected. Who we are as individuals and groups is frequently tied to specific spaces. This might be the city we live in or come from (I often mention that I was born in Munich to justify that I am a Bayern Munich supporter.), but it can also be spaces that are connected to the things that we do and that define us (for example, the library, the classroom but also the tennis court in my case). Historically, the idea of the nation has also been intimately connected to a specific space: that of the country. This often has problematic consequences. On the one hand, there are still people who think that the space called Germany (or Russia, or whatever) is exclusively reserved for German (or Russian, or whatever) nationals and that everybody else is at best a guest in this country and at worst an intruder. On the other, the existence of people thought to be German (or Russian, or whatever) beyond the borders of the country can be used as an argument that these borders need to be expanded. This argument was behind the annexation of parts of what was then Czechoslovakia by Nazi

Germany in 1938, and it is currently used by the Kremlin to legitimate its attempt to conquer parts of eastern Ukraine. Just as identity, then, space also carries the potential for conflict.

Moreover, spaces are often organized according to different, frequently intersecting identity categories. For example, many spaces are gendered. In District 12 of Panem, the mines are a distinctly masculine space. Only men are working there. In contemporary western culture, most spaces are open to all genders. The only exception are bathrooms and changing rooms, which has at times led to controversies between conservatives, who usually have an essentialist perspective on gender, and progressives, who tend to be constructionists, regarding which room transgender people should use. But even spaces which are theoretically and legally open to everybody often bear masculine or feminine connotations. As I already mentioned before, the private space of the home has for a long time been considered a feminine space, whereas public space has traditionally been considered masculine. As feminist critics have pointed out, this had the effect that the home functioned for men primarily as a space of leisure and relaxation, while it was a space of work for women who performed the role of the "home-maker." But as culture and society change, so do the gendered connotations of space, and the masculine/feminine connotations of the public/private distinction have in recent decades been increasingly challenged.

Race and class are also important coordinates along which space is organized in most cultures. I already provided an example of this when I discussed the effects of structural racism on the living conditions of African Americans in the United States in chapter 6, although I did not explicitly draw on the concept of space back then. Although racial segregation was officially outlawed decades ago, many neighborhoods are still (almost) exclusively Black or White. In these cases, race usually intersects with class, as I also showed in chapter 6, in that it is lower-class African Americans who are stuck in such neighborhoods, whereas middle- or upper-class Blacks enjoy considerably more mobility. And while there are officially no sundown towns anymore in the United States, that is, towns where Blacks are not tolerated after dark, Blacks have a considerably higher risk to be assaulted by residents or even shot at by the police if they enter a White neighborhood – especially after dark – than the other way around. (The racist stereotypes that I discussed in chapter 7 often trigger such violence.)

Other spaces – think of expensive restaurants or designer shops, on the one hand, and "1 Euro" shops and fast-food restaurants, on the other – are predominantly organized along class lines, with race being a less significant factor. Yet other spaces are organized according to age. Think about how certain bars and clubs cater to customers from different generations. Of course, age often intersects with class and/or race as well. I could provide endless examples here, but I won't. Instead, I would like to quickly introduce the distinction between space and place that has become increasingly important in Cultural Studies. It's a bit tricky because not all scholars agree on one definition, but most would say that space is abstract and general whereas place is concrete

and personal. Thus, we can talk about private space in general, but your home would be your place. Its organization and thus its meaning for you could be quite different from the meanings of private space in your culture in general. (Please note, however, that some scholars use "place" to refer to the cultural meanings of a location and use "space" to refer only to the measurable geographical location. When they say "place," they refer to what I mean by "space." Thus, always look out for how "space" and "place" are defined by your instructor or in the book or article that you are reading.)

The space/place distinction can serve as a reminder that space is often organized along binary oppositions. As we have seen repeatedly throughout this book, binary opposi-tions are usually hierarchized. One element of it is usually considered superior to the other. Since I have addressed the public/private distinction above already, let's turn to the first binary opposition that I mentioned in the introduction: the opposition of nature and culture. Back then, I treated this as a purely conceptual opposition, that is, one that has nothing to do with space, but it can of course also be considered a spatial one. Often, though, when the spatial dimension is stressed, it appears as the opposition of wilder-ness and civilization. Western movies, for example, are often organized along this bi-nary, and the characters that populate the film are usually firmly associated with one of these two spaces. The protagonist, however, is often somebody who moves between them. He possesses the skills necessary to survive in the wilderness but uses them in the service of civilization.

Importantly, the space where the action of western movies usually takes place is situ-ated between wilderness and civilization. It is the frontier where civilization has begun to arrive but has not yet been firmly established. The farmers and townspeople that live there represent civilization, but their victory is yet far from clear. They are in a precarious situation, threatened by Native Americans (usually represented in a highly problematic stereotypical fashion) or outlaws. The rule of law has not yet been firmly established and thus they depend on the protagonist for protection. Western movies are usually about the triumph of civilization and therefore they tend to value that part of the binary more highly. But there are exceptions within the genre, and many other cultural texts that reverse the hierarchy and propose a return to nature.

Another important binary in many cultures is the opposition of center and periphery. Traditionally, the center was valued more highly than the periphery and seen as more cultured, advanced, and civilized. In recent decades, however, this binary has been increasingly reversed in many representations, for example, in *The Hunger Games*. Katniss comes from District 12, which is located further away from the Capitol than all other districts. It thus represents the periphery, with the Capitol representing the center. However, as we have seen throughout this book and especially in chapters 6 and 7 where I talked about the problematic depiction of gender and sexuality in book and film, the periphery is valued much more highly than the center in the narrative. It is connoted as natural, honest, and peaceful, whereas the Capitol bears the connotations of artificiality, hypocrisy, and cruelty.

Significantly, Katniss is represented not only as a character from the periphery but also as an embodiment of liminality, as somebody located on the border between two spaces. She is not only from District 12, but from the very edge of it:

> Our part of District 12, nicknamed the Seam, is usually crawling with coal miners heading out to the morning shift at this hour. [...] Our house is almost on the edge of the Seam. I only have to pass a few gates to reach the scruffy field called the Meadow. Separating the Meadow from the woods, in fact enclosing all of District 12, is a high chain-link fence topped with barbed-wire loops. (Collins 4)

liminality

She lives where civilization ends and wilderness begins, and she feels – like many American characters in film and fiction – more comfortable in the wilderness. This is where she retreats to whenever she can, this is where she finds a bit of peace, and this is where she has acquired the skills that will later enable her to survive in the arena. (Let me add that liminality is not necessarily related to space. It can also refer to a state of in-betweenness with regard to different stages in one's life. Katniss is a liminal character in that sense, too. As we established in chapter 4, *The Hunger Games* is a coming-of-age story that relates her transition into adulthood.)

The final binary opposition that I would like to mention is the distinction between the Global North and the Global South. The term "Global North" refers to the economically rather well-off countries of Europe, North America, Oceania, and parts of Asia; the term "Global South" refers to the economically rather less well-off countries of Africa, South America, and other parts of Asia. For centuries, the countries of the Global South have been exploited by the countries of the Global North, and many of them are former colonies of Global Northern countries. (On one level, the relationship between the Capitol and the districts in *The Hunger Games* can be read as a metaphor for the relationship between the Global North and South.) For a long time, the countries of the Global South were predominantly referred to as postcolonial countries with the prefix "post" indicating that they had officially shed colonial rule but that its effects were still shaping their culture and identity. That the temporal designation has by now been largely replaced by a spatial one shows how important the concept of space has become in Cultural Studies and related fields and disciplines.

Global North and Global South

To finish this chapter, I would like to present an example that shows how memory and space are connected. As with other concepts that I have mentioned the connection is rather obvious. Especially cultural memory is often linked to specific spaces, or, in this case, places. The French historian Pierre Nora even speaks of "lieu de memoire" or "sites of memory." (He understands "sites" also as a metaphor and thus uses it to refer to other things than specific places, but we will ignore this here.) Such sites can be the battlefield of Verdun, where one of the longest and bloodiest battles of World War I took place, a football stadium like the Maracanã in Rio de Janeiro, or memorials such as the Memorial for the Murdered Jews of Europe in Berlin.

memory and space

But the relationship between space and memory can be far more complex. To provide an example, I would like to return to and build on what I said about the memory of World War II in the United States at the end of the first section of this chapter. Back then, I already mentioned the National World War II Memorial in Washington, DC. What I didn't say then is that the memorial is located on the National Mall, a park area in downtown Washington that you all know even if you have never been to the city. Many museums are located there, the White House, Congress, and the Supreme Court are there, and the most important memorials are located there: the Lincoln Memorial, the Washington Memorial, the Vietnam Veterans Memorial, and many others. In short, the Mall is where the United States defines itself as a nation, and cultural memory plays an important role in that.

In 1993, the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum was opened there – not directly on the Mall, but in close proximity, only one street away. Check out a map of the Mall online, and you will see how close it is to the Mall. The museum highlights the uniqueness of the Holocaust. Those of you who are German or have been educated in Germany are familiar with this idea. It is also an integral part of the German Holocaust memory. However, the historian Peter Novick has pointed out that stressing the uniqueness of the Holocaust serves very different functions in Germany and the United States. In Germany, it entails an acknowledgment of guilt, but in the United States, it serves to evade guilt:

> The […] talk of uniqueness and incomparability surrounding the Holocaust in the United States […] promotes evasion of moral and historical responsibility. The repeated assertion that whatever the United States has done to blacks, Native Americans, Vietnamese, or others pales in comparison to the Holocaust is true – and evasive. And whereas a serious and sustained encounter with the history of hundreds of years of enslavement and oppression of blacks might imply costly demands on Americans to redress the wrongs of the past, contemplating the Holocaust is virtually cost-free: a few cheap tears. (15)

Novick puts things rather bluntly, but he has a point. The existence of a museum commemorating a European atrocity that Americans were not involved in near the Mall in Washington, DC confirms and contributes to the more general self-congratulatory memory of World War II in the United States.

Significantly, remembering World War II and especially the Holocaust has long served the function of evading the memory of slavery and racist discrimination (which is, of course, still ongoing) in the United States. The National Museum of African American History and Culture, which commemorates these things and celebrates the achievements of Blacks in the United States, was only opened in 2016 – more than twenty years after the Holocaust Museum, from which it is not far away. (The National Museum of the American Indian opened in 2004.) That it exists now shows that the cultural memory of slavery and racism has changed over the past two decades; that it took so long for it to come into existence shows how contested this memory was for a long

the National Mall in Washington, DC

Holocaust memory

evading the memory of slavery

time – and to a large degree still is. Remembering is thus closely tied to forgetting, and remembering certain events, for example, the Holocaust, can serve the function of forgetting others, for example slavery.

Questions for Self-Study

1. Try to think of an episodic memory of yours that has changed over time. Which needs of the present have triggered the changes?
2. How is the pandemic remembered in Germany (or any other country of your choice)? How does the dominant discourse differ from the counter-discourse in this regard? Are there already forms of cultural memory?
3. The Nobel Laureate Toni Morrison opens her novel *Beloved* (1987), which deals with the fate of African Americans during slavery and after its abolition, with the sentence "Sixty Million and More." What does she mean by that?
4. What kind of space is the university classroom? Draw on the concepts introduced in this chapter and throughout this book to analyze it.

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11 Four Areas of Cultural Studies

We have nearly made it. There is only this chapter left (and then a few concluding pages). By now, basically everything you need to know about Cultural Studies at this stage of your studies has been put on the table. You have an extremely solid foundation on which you can build in subsequent classes and modules. In this chapter I want to quickly introduce you to four areas that are of central interest to Cultural Studies: popular culture, visual culture, material culture, and convergence culture. But a lot of what is studied as popular culture could also be studied as visual culture or even convergence culture, and other parts of it also fall into the category of material culture. Rather than being strictly separated, these four areas are therefore best considered as overlapping. In a different sense, then, these areas also stand for different perspectives on cultural phenomena of all sorts. When I study a film as an example of popular culture, I ask different questions and apply different theories than when I study it as an example of visual culture.

different perspectives on cultural phenomena

While there is no really good general introduction to Cultural Studies, there are a number of excellent introductions to the different areas I discuss in this chapter. I mention these books in the respective sections, and they are listed in the bibliography at the end of this chapter, so if you would like to learn more about one of these areas, you know where to start. As you will quickly realize, I have used examples from these areas throughout the book, so not everything is entirely new to you. For example, I have mentioned the distinction between mass culture and high culture, which constitutes one perspective on popular culture, when I introduced the theory of the production of consumption in chapter 8. And I have repeatedly mentioned that we use material objects like clothes to perform our identity. Accordingly, putting this chapter at the very end allows me to tie some of the threads running through this book together, and to reiterate some of the central points.

not everything is entirely new

Popular Culture

In many ways, we all know what popular culture is. As with many other concepts that I have discussed in this book, talk of popular culture is part of everyday discourse. But even there, popular culture is often a contested concept. Some people look down on what they consider popular culture – on pop music, comic strips, and soap operas – because it does not seem to be real culture (like opera or poetry), Culture with a capital "C," for them. (We already found out in the introduction that that's a silly position.) Others may celebrate popular culture as anti-elitist and more authentic than other forms of culture. As we will see, these different evaluations of popular culture stem from the fact that people have very different definitions of the phenomenon in mind. Drawing on the excellent work of John Storey, whom I have referred to repeatedly in

popular culture as a contested concept

this book, I will discuss five different definitions, ending with the one that I find most suitable and productive for Cultural Studies.

The first definition that Storey provides is a purely quantitative one. Popular culture is "culture that is widely favored by or well-liked by many people" (5). This puts popular culture in opposition to what one might term "unpopular" culture, that is, culture that is not liked by many people but only by a small group. (As we will see, nearly all definitions of popular culture put the concept in binary opposition to another one.) This quantitative definition has two advantages. First, unlike most other definitions that we will encounter, it is completely neutral. It does not say if it is a good or bad thing that popular culture is liked by many people; it merely states it. Second, this definition is obviously correct. After all, the adjective "popular" means that something or somebody is liked by many people.

But this immediately alerts us to the shortcomings of the quantitative definition. Because it is so obvious, it is not enough. On the one hand, it is too vague. It is unclear where the threshold would be. How many copies does a book need to sell to be considered popular culture? How many people need to watch a film or a TV show? No such yardstick exists. On the other, it is not sufficient. The bible has sold hundreds of millions of copies worldwide, but we would hardly consider it popular culture. The same goes for classic pieces of literature like Shakespeare's plays or F. Scott Fitzgerald's novel *The Great Gatsby* (1925), which I discussed in chapter 6. They may not have been huge commercial successes when they were first published, but because of their canonization and integration in the curriculum of schools and universities they have been selling well and steadily for decades. At the same time, there are films and TV shows that are only watched by a few thousand people and many novels that find virtually no readers at all. These texts (in the broad sense defined in chapter 2) prove to be extremely unpopular. Still, we may want to treat them differently than a collection of modernist poetry that sold only a few dozen copies. The quantitative definition alone, then, will not do.

The other definitions of popular culture that Storey discusses all add a qualitative dimension to the quantitative one. The second definition he outlines defines popular culture as the other of high culture: Popular culture is thus defined as the "culture that is left over after we have decided what high culture is" (5). In this rather schematic definition, high culture is seen as complex, popular culture is seen as simple. High culture is said to be focused on form and the outcome of individual creation, whereas popular culture is seen as focused on content alone and the outcome of industrial mass production. High culture is considered art produced without economic interest; popular culture is seen as a commodity produced to make money. High culture is difficult to understand; it requires active reception and is made for a small group of people who possess genuine taste. It is art. Popular culture is consumed passively by the masses without taste. It does not qualify as art.

Does this sound familiar? Well, if it does, it's because it's how many people still think about popular culture. However, and this should be clear to all of you by now, very little of this is true. The distinction between high culture and popular culture just outlined does not hold. It only exists in the eye of the beholder. To begin with, this binary opposition relies on an idealized image of high culture. It assumes that true art exists outside of the circuit of culture, that it is severed from economic needs and everyday politics, that it transcends time and place, and that it is untouched by the discourses of its time. Obviously, this is wrong, as my argument throughout this book about what culture is and how it works has shown.

idealized image of high culture

Moreover, as Storey observes, with a nod to Bourdieu, whose theories on consumption I introduced in chapter 8, taste is "a deeply ideological category" (6). It is – like everything – not naturally given, but culturally constructed, and it often serves the purpose to present the consumption of one particular group and thus the group itself as superior to the consumption of another group and thus to that group. Claiming that one appreciates high culture, whereas the others consume popular culture is a form of othering, a concept that I introduced in chapter 5. It says nothing about the cultural phenomena thus classified but a lot about identity construction.

taste as an ideological category

Finally, the cultural status of different cultural phenomena changes over time, which further challenges the allegedly natural division of the cultural field into high and popular culture. The writings of William Shakespeare, for example, have long been regarded as the epitome of high culture. Students have a lot of respect when the time comes for them to read their first Shakespeare play because Shakespeare is said to be difficult, as one would expect of high culture. Countless films and TV shows try to boost their own cultural capital by including intertextual references to Shakespeare's works, and very often when a text tries to introduce a character as particularly cultured and a deep thinker, we see that character reading Shakespeare. (The scene I always think of in this regard is the introduction of Sean Connery's character in the action film *The Rock* [1996].) But when Shakespeare wrote his plays in the late 16th and early 17th centuries, they were not at all regarded as high culture (and not only because the distinction between high and popular culture did not yet exist). The performances were attended by people from all classes; they were a very popular form of entertainment. In the Globe Theatre in London where most of them were originally performed, a large part of the audience watched the plays standing because they could not pay for seats. The plays only came to be considered high culture during the 19th century when intellectuals like Matthew Arnold, whom I mentioned in the introduction, began to classify works along the distinction of high culture and popular culture.

the writings of William Shakespeare

More recently, the general understanding of TV shows has also changed. Until the 2000s, TV shows were regarded by most people exclusively as popular culture, as often cheaply produced mass entertainment that neither required serious engagement when watching nor justified scholarly attention that focused on the shows themselves. (Their impact on the audience and the demographics of different audiences were studied.) The

TV shows

narratives were perceived as formulaic and thus predictable, the characters as flat and stereotypical. By now, this image has changed completely, and critics are speaking of an age of "quality TV" or "complex TV" (Mittell). TV shows and their aesthetics, their narrative structures, and character conceptions are by now considered a perfectly legitimate topic of scholarly work. Academic journals and monographs are devoted to their analysis, and the arts sections of quality newspapers regularly review new shows. Many TV shows are by now canonized (in fact, on my website you can find a list of shows my team and I think our students should watch) and regarded as high culture by those who continue to use the concept. However, even the most artistic shows are clearly part of the capitalist economy and its mode of production. Just remember my discussion of *Breaking Bad*'s "Fly episode" in chapter 8.

The third definition that Storey discusses is closely connected to the previous one: It defines popular culture "as 'mass culture'" (8). This definition, too, considers popular culture the other of high culture. But whereas the previous definition focused on the allegedly poor quality of popular culture, the understanding of it as mass culture focuses on its political dimension. The two major theoretical schools that promote this understanding of popular culture both consider it problematic and even dangerous. Interestingly, though, they disagree completely in what ways popular culture is problematic. Scholars from the Frankfurt School worried that popular culture worked to maintain the status quo and prevent the working class from developing a genuine class consciousness. As I explained in chapter 8 when I discussed their theory of the production of consumption, their position is that popular culture alienates the masses from their true needs by creating artificial ones and pacifies its consumers. In other words, for old-fashioned Marxist critics, mass culture is bad because it prevents the socialist revolution from happening.

By contrast, the English literary critic F.R. Leavis, who was greatly influenced by Matthew Arnold, worried that mass culture was threatening the established social order, which he wanted to defend because he was not a Marxist but a conservative. Like the critics of the Frankfurt School, he bemoaned the impact of the industrial revolution on culture. And like them, he was concerned about Americanization, the allegedly harmful influence of U.S. popular culture on European cultures. Unlike them, however, he argued that mass culture would instigate rebellion and insubordination. The Frankfurt School hoped for a revolution, Leavis was afraid of it.

This understanding of popular culture as folk culture is – in both the Marxist and the conservative version – still fairly widespread. The ideas of the Frankfurt School are still popular among left-wing scholars and activists; the ideas of F.R. Leavis are still popular among conservatives. However, as should nearly go without saying at this stage, this theory is problematic and of little value. As we saw above, the binary opposition between high culture and popular culture does not hold. Moreover, as we saw in chapter 8, consumers are not the passive victims of the producers and easily mani-

pulated all the time. Instead, they actively engage with representations and artefacts, often creating their own meanings and at times appropriating them for their purposes.

Finally, Americanization is a far more complex process than the Marxist and conservative versions of the mass culture theory acknowledge. It is simply not true that American popular culture corrupts or replaces traditional European cultures, which are seen in this theory as authentic, homogeneous, and organic. Not only are cultures never authentic, homogeneous, and organic, but always already fragmented and hybrid; the process of Americanization is one of exchange, mutual influencing, and selected appropriation. Just as consumers are not the passive victims of mass culture, so are European and other cultures not the passive victims of American culture.

<div style="float:right; font-style:italic;">Americani-zation</div>

If Storey's third definition of popular culture is closely tied to the theory of the production of consumption discussed in chapter 8, the fourth definition is as closely tied to the theory of consumption as appropriation and resistance I discussed there as well. This approach understands "popular culture as folk culture" (9), as the culture of the people. In this understanding, popular culture is not contrasted with high culture but with mass culture. The proponents of this theory, most notably the media scholar John Fiske, understand mass culture in the tradition of the Frankfurt School but see the consumers of culture, that is, the people, not as passive but as active. In one version of this theory, folk culture is seen as completely produced by the people. One example would be the local music society ("Musikverein") that performs for free at local and district festivals. In another version of this theory, folk culture is the culture that the people produce by appropriating and changing mass culture. One example would be fanfiction, that is, stories that take the characters and worlds of popular novels, TV shows, or films and create new stories for them. Often, fans use such stories to rewrite plots they didn't like or have their favorite characters engage in – frequently non-heteronormative – relationships that may have been hinted at in the original, but never really materialized. In either version, folk culture is seen as a vehicle for the people to express dissatisfaction with the status quo and to resist the meanings imposed on them by mass culture.

<div style="float:right; font-style:italic;">popular culture as folk culture</div>

This theory of popular culture has strengths and weaknesses. It is useful because it stresses the active role of consumers and does not see them as entirely passive. However, what I said about the theory of consumption as appropriation and resistance also goes for the theory of popular culture as folk culture. It goes to the other extreme and ascribes too much power and agency to consumers. As we saw in chapter 8, consumers do not transform everything all the time. Moreover, even if they renegotiate the meanings of cultural phenomena, these transformations do not necessarily stand in opposition to the meanings inscribed during the process of production (think of Hall's idea of a negotiated reading, which I introduced in chapter 8). And if the meanings are in fact reversed in a process of appropriation, it does not follow automatically that the new meanings are better and more democratic, as the proponents of this theory usually assume. They can just as well be reactionary and undemocratic. Finally, it is

<div style="float:right; font-style:italic;">strengths and weakn-esses</div>

unclear who counts as a part of the people and who doesn't, and thus where mass culture ends, and folk culture begins.

The fifth and final definition that Story presents (that's not quite true because he discusses another definition that links popular culture to what is called postmodernism, but we will ignore this one) understands popular culture from the perspective of hegemony. From this perspective, popular culture "is not the imposed culture of the mass culture theorists, nor is it an emerging from below, spontaneously oppositional culture of 'the people' – it is a terrain of exchange and negotiation between the two: a terrain […] marked by resistance and incorporation" (Storey 10). In other words, popular culture is understood as a site of ideological struggle where different texts and practices are positioned differently and allow for different interpretations.

This definition of popular culture has more strengths than weaknesses. It is good that it acknowledges the power of the producers to establish meanings as well as the power of the consumers to resist these meanings and to appropriate cultural phenomena for their own purposes. What's also positive about it is that it allows – and arguably even requires – us to differentiate within the vast field of popular culture. Using it, we can identify texts and practices that tend to uphold the status quo (and thus can be appropriated for subversive purposes), texts and practices that are ambivalent and can be read either way, and texts and practices that are rather subversive of the status quo (and thus can be appropriated for conservative purposes). The only aspect that I find problematic about this theory is that it is implicitly still based on the distinction between high and popular culture and continues to transport romanticized notions about high culture (whatever that is). After all, everything I said in this paragraph applies to phenomena one would classify as high culture just as much as to those classified as popular culture.

This could lead us to the conclusion that one should stop using the concept of popular culture. However, this will not happen in the foreseeable future, and thus it is important to be aware of the different understandings that are in circulation in Cultural Studies and beyond. And when you use the concept for your own analysis, point out on which theory you are drawing. (I hope it will be the fifth definition, of course.) Because as I stressed in the introduction, different theories make us see different things. Take *The Hunger Games*, for instance. It is an example of popular culture according to all theories except the one of popular culture as folk culture. According to this theory, *The Hunger Games* is not popular culture but "only" mass culture. Fanfiction based on *The Hunger Games*, however, would qualify as popular culture.

More importantly, our understanding of *The Hunger Games* changes depending on which definition of popular culture we are drawing on. Obviously, the quantitative definition does not help us a lot. We can just say that both the novels and the films obviously are popular culture because they are liked and consumed by many people. The theory that sees popular culture as the other of high culture draws our attention

Margin notes:
- popular culture from the perspective of hegemony
- more strengths than weaknesses
- *The Hunger Games*
- different theories lead to different insights

to the formulaic aspects of the narratives. The novel is, from that perspective, a typical piece of Young Adult Fiction with a first-person narrator who comes of age over the course of the story. The film appears, from that perspective, also as rather standard Hollywood fare that highlights action, promotes heteronormativity, and is geared at male teenagers as the target audience. Assuming the mass culture perspective, both the novels and the films offer rather cheap escapes from the contradictions of contemporary capitalism. They address some of its negative effects but invite us to lean back and enjoy how an unlikely heroine sets things right over the course of the trilogy.

If this sounds wrong, then I am happy because I obviously favor understanding popular culture from the perspective of hegemony as a site of ideological struggles. If you remember the many times that I have drawn on *The Hunger Games* throughout the book, it should be clear that novels and films – albeit in different ways – are highly ambivalent. Their critique of capitalism is not as superficial as the mass culture perspective would have it. But as we saw in chapter 9, they are also completely incorporated into the logic of capitalism. The representation of Katniss is quite progressive, as she combines traits that are traditionally regarded as feminine and traits that are traditionally regarded as masculine. However, the representation of sexuality and race is rather conservative and at times even seems to fall back on essentialist ideas. On the whole, then, understanding popular culture through the lens of hegemony is more productive than the other approaches, and allows for more nuanced analyses.

the ambivalence of The Hunger Games

Visual Culture

The definition of visual culture is much less controversial than that of popular culture. Here's the definition by Nicholas Mirzoeff from his very good introduction to the study of visual culture:

definition of visual culture

> Visual culture is concerned with visual events in which information, meaning or pleasure is sought by the consumer in an interface with visual technology. By visual technology, I mean any form of apparatus designed to be looked at or enhance natural vision, from oil paintings to television and the Internet. Such criticism takes account of image making, the formal components of a given image, and the crucial completion of that work by its cultural reception. (3)

You can tell immediately how well this definition goes together with what I have discussed in this book. According to Mirzoeff, visual culture is about everything that can be and is seen, as long as some "visual technology" is involved. Thus, you looking at a car parked across the street would not be a topic for it. But you looking at the car while wearing glasses or contact lenses or using binoculars would be. Moreover, the study of visual culture is concerned with visual representations of all kinds and investigates their meanings. Like Cultural Studies more generally, scholars take into account the representations as such ("the formal components"), their production ("image making"), and their "cultural reception." And while he does not mention it in this short definition,

visual culture is of course also interested in the construction of identities and in the regulation of images, their production, consumption, and circulation. In fact, many of the examples that I provided when I introduced the concept of regulation in chapter 8 concerned the Hollywood film industry and thus came from the area of visual culture.

Visual culture is nearly as old as mankind. Just think of the cave paintings that have been discovered in various places around the world and that date back more than 40,000 years. However, most scholars of visual culture agree that the visual has become a more and more important part of virtually all cultures over the past centuries and especially the last decades. This is certainly true. Whereas images were still quite rare during the Middle Ages, we are today surrounded by images. That's because there are by now countless technologies that make it easier and easier for us to make or take images, to reproduce them, to circulate them, and to consume them. Just think of a few recent ones like digital photography, cell phone cameras, tablets, or social media like Instagram. The German quality newspaper *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* has only featured an image on the cover page every day since 2007. Before that, photos on that page were rare and only used for very special occasions. Today, it's impossible to imagine this or any other newspaper without an image on the cover page.

Scholars therefore speak of a new visual culture that is quantitatively and qualitatively different from earlier times. Not only are there far more images around now than ever before; the visual has also replaced the written word as the dominant way to relate to and make sense of the world. Most contemporary cultures do not only heavily rely on images but also visualization, "[the] tendency to picture or visualize experience" and thus to make things visible that are not in themselves visible (Mirzoeff 6). Take, for example, the pandemic. Visualization played a central role on many different levels in our understanding and handling of it. Just think of the quick tests that we all took so many times at home or test centers. These tests visualized something that is not in itself visible. One strip indicated that you are not infected; two strips indicated that you were, and no strip meant that something was wrong with the test. Or think about all the talk about waves of infections. This talk depended entirely on a very specific visualization of the increase and decrease of infections over time. Only if you visualize the development of infection in a very specific way do you get images of waves.

On a certain level, then, visualizations are representations. And what goes for representation in general therefore also goes for visualization. As I explained in chapter 2, representations are not a transparent window on reality; they do not merely mirror the world, as the reflective approach to representation would have it. Instead, representations produce meaning, as the constructionist approach says. Accordingly, visualizations construct meaning that is not there prior to the act of visualization. This is an important point to remember because in our daily lives we tend to treat visualizations (just like other representations) as reflections that – in this sense, quite literally – show us how things are. This tendency is further enforced if there are experts in-

we are surrounded by images

visualization

visualizations construct meaning

volved who explain visualizations to us with the authority that their position bestows on them.

Just think of an ultrasound image of a fetus or a scan of your brain. Usually, we treat these images as accurate representations of reality and not as the result of complex processes of visualization. But as the name already implies, ultrasound images are sound patterns that a computer translates into an image, not a direct image of the fetus. And when you do a brain scan, a computer translates certain types of activity into colors. Of course, this is often quite helpful, but we should not forget that things are more complicated than they appear, and that specific visualizations thus construct a specific truth – about your unborn baby, your brain, or the pandemic. I don't know how else one could have visualized the development of infection numbers, but an alternative visualization might have changed the discourse about the pandemic.

visualizations construct truth

As we know by now – and as I explained in detail in chapter 3 where I addressed the theories of Michel Foucault – the construction of truth is inextricably linked to issues of power. This is what Marita Sturken and Lisa Cartwright focus on in their excellent introduction to visual culture where they also highlight that scientific visualizations function like other representations:

> Because scientific imagery often comes to us with confident authority behind it, in the form of images made by experts, we may assume that these images are objective representations of knowledge, whether we view them through the popular media or through professional publications. But […] scientific images and looking practices are as dependent on cultural context and culturally informed interpretation as images from popular culture, art and the news. (347)

Whereas I stressed how the visualizations themselves do not merely reflect reality but construct specific images of it and thus specific meanings, Sturken and Cartwright add to this that the meaning of visualizations also depends on their interpretation. While we all can read the visualizations of coronavirus infections, the images of a brain scan are unintelligible to most of us. And even the ultrasonic images of unborn babies often require interpretation. These interpretations are usually done by experts who do not only have the technical equipment and thus the power to visualize; they also have the power to interpret these images and fix their meaning. In everyday life, of course, this is usually convenient and helpful. But it is important to keep in mind that the meaning of visualizations is constructed by the systems of representation used and the experts who interpret these images.

the meaning of visualizations depends on interpretation

In some cases, when the visualization is not done rather automatically by a machine but by humans (albeit, of course, with the help of machines), visualization can even undercut an intended meaning. In chapter 9 I discussed how John Carpenter's film *They Live* (1988) dramatizes the idea of stepping out of ideology, of shedding false consciousness and perceiving the world how it really is. When protagonist Nada (Roddy Piper) puts on the glasses he has found, he not only recognizes the ideological messages

visualization can undercut an intended meaning

that he and everybody else are being manipulated with. He also sees that aliens are living among the population of Los Angeles, and that they are the ones who exploit the humans. The film is clearly intended as a critique of the exploitation of the working classes and the aliens are meant as a metaphor for the dominant classes. But by visualizing class conflict in this way the film undermines its intended meaning. In the final analysis, it suggests that exploitation and class conflict are not something inherent in capitalist societies, something that comes from inside the system itself because the system is flawed, but that they come from the outside. People are suffering because aliens have secretly invaded the United States, the film suggests, thus implying – most probably unwittingly – that capitalism is fine until it is corrupted by outside forces.

By contrast, *Pretty Woman*, another film I addressed in chapters 7 and 8, avoids undermining its dominant-hegemonic meaning (a concept I introduced in chapter 8) by refusing to visualize a key moment in the narrative. At the meeting between Edward's team and that of Mr. Morse, the owner of the company he intended to buy and dismantle, Edward (Richard Gere) sends everybody out of the room and then informs Morse (Ralph Bellamy) that his plans have changed and that he wants to help him make his company successful again. As I already pointed out in chapter 8, Morse asks "Why?" – but when Edward takes a deep breath and starts to answer, the narrative cuts away from the conversation. The next shot shows Edward's lawyer (Jason Alexander), who is cast as the true villain of the film, pressing his ear against the door of the conference room in order to hear what his boss and Morse are talking about. This refusal to visualize Edward's explanation is clever, as it saves the film from presenting an unsatisfying explanation. Edward can't tell Morse that he changed his mind because he has fallen in love, which is the explanation the film suggests, because that would be inappropriate in a business context. But he cannot offer a sound economic reason for his change of heart because there is none. From a business point of view, the decision not to buy the company and sell its parts does not make sense. By withholding the explanation, *Pretty Woman* maintains the fiction that love can heal the excesses of capitalism.

A concept that is even more important to Cultural Studies, especially when the analysis of visual representations like films is concerned, is the concept of the gaze. According to the *Merriam-Webster* dictionary the gaze is "a fixed intent look." The corresponding verb "to gaze" thus means "to fix the eyes in a steady intent look often with eagerness or studious attention." Cultural Studies draws on this everyday meaning but adds to it. In Cultural Studies and related fields and disciplines, the act of gazing and being gazed at is connected to questions of power. The ones who do the looking – usually a privileged group – have the power over the group that is being looked at. They can define the group that they gaze at, objectify it, and impose their truth on it.

Does this sound abstract and opaque? Let's zoom in on some examples, and things will become clearer quickly. The concept of the gaze was popularized by the feminist film scholar Laura Mulvey in an article from 1975 in which she applies the idea of what she

refusal to visualize

the gaze

calls the male gaze to Hollywood cinema. According to Mulvey, Hollywood films from the classical period, that is, the time between the 1920s and the 1960s, are filmed in a way that men do the looking and women are being looked at. The female characters within the fictional world and thus also the actresses who play them are usually exposed to the male gaze. Men watching these films, Mulvey argues, can either identify with the male protagonists, who also look at the women, and thus imagine themselves in a more active role. Or they can metaphorically lean back and enjoy what's happening on the screen from a voyeuristic position. In any case, the way in which looks are distributed in Hollywood cinema cements patriarchy and heteronormativity. Men are cast as active – they are the subjects who do the gazing – and women as passive – they are the objects who are gazed at. What is more, the power of looking, Mulvey suggested, more generally establishes the power of men over women. And as men gaze at women and desire them, the films present heterosexuality as the only option and, in fact, natural.

There is much to be said in favor of Mulvey's theory. Importantly, it not only applies to Hollywood films before the late 1960s but to American films until today, American TV shows, and to films and TV shows from many other national cultures as well as to video games, music videos, and other cultural forms. I am sure you have no trouble thinking of a lot of films, shows, games, or videos in which female characters are – often half naked or completely naked – displayed to the gaze of a male character and the audience. Often women are objectified in such films in that they are not only reduced to the function of providing sexual pleasure for the male characters and audience, but also reduced to an assembly of body parts. Frequently, camerawork and editing concentrate on their breasts, butts, and legs, effectively severing them from the rest of the body and thus robbing the female characters of agency and individuality.

There are of course films, shows, and games that resist this way of representing women, or even expose it, and these representations have become more frequent in recent years. *The Hunger Games* films are just one example. Katniss is present in almost all scenes, but she is never displayed for the audience in a sexualized fashion. The camera never lingers on her or parts of her body – not even when she is skimpily dressed as during some of the pre-Games events in the Capitol. And there never is a shot of a male character who looks at her and then a next shot that shows which body part of her he is looking at. This a common editing pattern in Hollywood film, but *The Hunger Games* films completely avoid it. Or take *Wonder Woman* (2017). I am sure you are familiar with the character from the comic book. Her short and tight-fitting costume lends itself to the sexualization of the character, and this is how she has usually been treated in earlier representations. But the film mostly avoids her objectification and sexualization – even during the first minutes of the film, which show Wonder Woman (Gal Gadot) and the other Amazons practicing their warrior skills on the hidden island of Themyscira. The physical exercises that they do could easily be used to display not only one but dozens of young and attractive female bodies, but the film does not do this. In fact,

the male gaze

objectification of women

sexualization

it only does so to a certain degree later when Wonder Woman has entered "our" world. While she is in London, she is gazed at by a number of men who are puzzled by her beauty and her unconventional behavior which defies the gender expectations of the time. However, the effect of such shots is not so much that they sexualize Wonder Woman than reveal how women are treated in patriarchal societies.

However, Mulvey's theory is a bit one-sided. Quite obviously, heterosexual men are not the only ones who enjoy looking at the female protagonist on screen and imagine themselves in the gazing protagonist's place. So surely do homosexual women. Moreover, it is not true that Hollywood and other films always feature male characters as those who gaze and female ones as the ones being gazed at – not even in the past. Regularly, it is the other way around. Take *It Happened One Night* (1934) whose intersections of class and gender I discussed towards the end of chapter 7. When Ellen (Claudette Colbert) and Peter (Clark Gable) have to share a room on their way to New York because they don't have enough money for two separate rooms, Peter divides the room into two halves with a blanket. In order to make Ellen retreat to her part, he starts undressing in front of her. In an unusually long shot for Hollywood (remember my remarks on that in chapter 8) that lasts more than 30 seconds the camera shows how Peter takes off his tie, shoes, socks, and shirt, displaying his naked chest. If we take into consideration that Hollywood films at that time were usually watched by more women than men and that Gable was one of the greatest stars of the period and an object of desire for many heterosexual women (and homosexual men), it is obvious that the purpose of the scene is to cater to what scholars call the female gaze.

In recent decades, the concept of the gaze has been used in Cultural Studies and related fields to analyze power relationships beyond gender and sexuality. Scholars have used derivates like the White gaze (to capture how BIPoCs are objectified and represented in stereotypical fashion in discourses about race), the imperial or colonial gaze (to capture how the western countries have constructed and represented other regions of the world as inferior and thus legitimized their subjugation), or the medical gaze (to capture how medical professionals exert power over their patients and construct their identities). In many ways, then, the concept of the gaze has proven as productive as that of hegemony, which, as we saw in chapter 9, has also been taken from the context of class conflict and applied to other areas. These uses of the concept of the gaze often combine a focus on the visual – for example, on the representations of BIPoCs – with a more metaphorical use of the gaze as the power to define a different group of people (or region of the world) and construct a specific truth about it.

Material Culture

Like visual culture, material culture is nothing new for you at this point, as we have been concerned with it repeatedly over the course of this book. In chapter 2, I have addressed the semiotics of fashion, in chapter 8, I have used the Walkman as an example, and I have talked about facemasks at various times. What clothes, the Walkman, and

the female gaze

power relationships beyond gender and sexuality

masks have in common is that they are objects. And objects are what material culture is concerned with. It is interested in cultural practices, in how people interact with objects and use objects, and in the meanings these objects carry for them.

objects

However, it is also interested in representations of specific objects (for example, advertisement campaigns for jeans or the Walkman). In his introduction to material culture studies, Ian Woodward explains why:

representations of specific objects

> Material culture is, chiefly, something portable and perceptible by touch and therefore has a physical, material existence that is one component of human cultural practice. Moreover, consistent with contemporary work in consumption studies that emphasises the mental or ideational aspects of consumption desires which are mobilised through media and advertising, material culture also includes things perceptible by sight. This ability to visualise material culture allows it to enter the imaginary realm of fantasy and desire so that objects are also acted upon in the mind. (14-15)

Even if you are not familiar with all the concepts Woodward draws on here, you get the general gist: Material culture is interested in the representations of objects because these representations have an impact on the meaning that the objects themselves have for the people who use and engage with them.

At first sight, the passage just quoted might be understood as suggesting that material culture studies locates the meanings of an object primarily in its production and the representations linked to this process. But this could not be further from the truth. Woodward even locates material culture within a larger field that he calls "consumption studies" in the same passage, and scholars working in the field have a very nuanced understanding of the relationship between production and consumption: It is the interplay between both that determines the meaning of an object. Sometimes one is more important than the other, but both have to be taken into account for a thorough understanding of any given object.

the interplay of production and consumption

Unsurprisingly, then, given that the model of the circuit of culture, which I have adopted for this book, was developed for a case study of the Walkman and thus an object, material culture studies is, like Cultural Studies in general, interested in all five elements on the circuit of culture. Its focus, however, lies on the connections between consumption and identity. Since this is a topic that I have discussed extensively in chapter 8, albeit with the focus on consumption more generally, I do not need to repeat things here.

the connections between consumption and identity

Let me just say that objects and their uses can be studied for their significance for individual identity or collective identity . Often, however, as we already saw in chapter 5 where I addressed these two forms of identity, the two categories overlap. The cross necklace that a friend of mine is wearing around her neck is an indicator of her individual identity and her collective identity at the same time. Like a considerable number of other people, she is a Christian. But it is not difficult to imagine a scenario where

objects and identity

somebody wears a cross necklace although she is not a Christian. They might be wearing it because it reminds them of their grandmother who gave it to them (and who may or may not have been a Christian herself) or for some other reason that an analysis could unearth. However, since material culture is a part of Cultural Studies, the focus is usually on collective identity – and on the shared meanings of all kinds of objects for different groups.

Convergence Culture

Visual and material culture are as old as mankind. Popular culture emerged in western countries in the 19th century. It is thus young when compared to visual and material culture, but pretty old when compared to the final area I want to address in this chapter. Convergence culture is a very recent phenomenon. It is linked to structural changes in the entertainment industry that occurred during the 1980s and the rise of the internet and the digital turn a few years later. But what is convergence? Unlike the terms designating the other three areas, this term is less frequently used in everyday life and it is quite likely that you haven't encountered it before. According to Henry Jenkins, the scholar who has most thoroughly and influentially theorized convergence culture, convergence

> represents a paradigm shift – a move from medium-specific content toward content that flows across multiple media channels, toward increased interdependence of communication systems, toward multiple ways of accessing media content, and toward ever more complex relations between top-down corporate media and bottom-up participatory culture. (242)

This is a spot-on definition, but the sentence is nevertheless quite dense. So, let's unpack it. What Jenkins is basically saying is that there are two dimensions to convergence culture. On the one hand, there is a convergence of media channels. Content is no longer distributed by producers through one channel alone, but multiple channels at the same time. Simultaneously, the same content is accessed by consumers in different ways and no longer in one specific one. On the other hand, convergence concerns the relationship between producers and consumers, which is becoming "ever more complex."

Still confused? Things will get clearer in a second. Jenkins calls the first dimension of convergence culture corporate convergence. What he means by that is the emergence of media conglomerates since the early 1980s. Take the Walt Disney Company, for example. As of this writing, the company comprises several film studios, TV stations and radio stations, several streaming services, a publishing house, and amusement parks. It produces films, TV shows, web content, radio programs, books, magazines, toys, video games, and a lot of other things. It produces content for all kinds of media and distributes it to the consumers (mostly) without involving other companies. As such, it is quite typical of companies in the global entertainment business. It is the biggest player in the field, but many others are structured quite similarly.

a very recent phenomenon

two dimensions to convergence culture

corporate convergence

The business idea behind such conglomerates is to create synergy effects. The different parts of the parent company are meant to benefit from each other by using each other's content and, in fact, producing content together. The whole is supposed to be more than the individual parts. This business model is perfectly suited for maximizing the effect of blockbuster films, whose revenue depends, as I explained in the section on consumption in chapter 8, to a large degree on merchandise such as toys. A new Disney film, for example, will be advertised and favorably reviewed in TV programs and print products of the company. The audience can buy novels or comic books based on the film from a publisher that belongs to the Disney company. There will be toys and other merchandise sold by other parts of the parent company; and often there is a video game based on the film produced by yet a different part; and the story makes it into one of Disney's many amusement parks. Later, the film is shown on Disney's TV channels and streaming services, and there might be TV spin-offs – and, of course, sequels so that the cycle begins again.

Since most of you are no doubt familiar with the most popular story franchises of our time such as *Star Wars*, the Marvel Cinematic Universe, or *Harry Potter*, most of you also already know the effect of this development. Films, TV shows, comics, novels, and video games tell the same overall story in that they all contribute to the same story-world, be that the galaxy far, far away where *Star Wars* is set or the world of Hogwarts. But these different media all tell different parts of the larger story (and even if they tried, they couldn't tell the same story, as we saw in chapter 3 because the medium has an impact on the meaning). It used to be enough to watch the *Star Wars* films to get if not the whole, at least most of the story (there were *Star Wars* novels in the early 1980s already), but it isn't anymore. These days you need to watch TV shows, play video games, and read comics if you want to know everything about your favorite story universe. This is what Jenkins means when he writes that there has been "a move from medium-specific content toward content that flows across multiple media channels, toward increased interdependence of communication systems." In other words, an important dimension of convergence culture is the tendency towards transmedial storytelling. A story like *Star Wars* is no longer developed in one medium alone or predominantly but spread across several media.

This shift toward transmedial storytelling has gradually accelerated over the past decades. Since *Star Wars* has existed since the late 1970s, this acceleration can be traced very well on that franchise. If everything of importance was related in the films of the original *Star Wars* trilogy (1977-1983), the prequel trilogy, produced long before Lucasfilm was bought by Disney (1999-2005), was already a different matter. Just think of Anakin Skywalker's scar, which he got at some point between *Attack of the Clones* (2002) and *Revenge of the Sith* (2005). How he got the scar is never addressed in the films, and fans who wanted to know the whole story had to read issue 71 of the *Republic* comic book series for the explanation. By the way, the example of the scar also shows how difficult it can be to ensure chronology and coherence when a narrative is deve-

synergy

transmedial storytelling

Star Wars

loped transmedially because that issue of *Republic* is set after the TV series *Clone Wars* (2008-20) but in the series, Anakin has the scar already. George Lucas, back then still the mastermind behind *Star Wars*, obviously did not care about logic in this case; what counted for him was the symbolic function of the scar. It symbolizes Anakin's scarred mind after the death of his mother and thus anticipates the physical and psychological scarring that will turn him into Darth Vader at the end of *Revenge of the Sith*. By now, Disney has produced so many TV shows that focus on different aspects of the *Star Wars* universe that future films may no longer even be a privileged part of the story-world but just one element among many.

On the consumption end, the tendency towards transmedial storytelling corresponds to a multiplication of the "ways of accessing media content," as Jenkins puts it in the passage I quoted above. What he means is that people used to access a story-world like *Star Wars* in the cinema and through the TV screen, and maybe through print. They can still do that as old media usually do not disappear (Linear television is still around.), but they can now watch a *Star Wars* film or TV show also on Blu-ray or stream it. And they can use a computer, a tablet, their cell phone, or a television with internet access for that. On the one hand, then, there are multiple ways to consume media content; on the other, there is a convergence on your phone or computer. It all comes together there. You can watch films and shows with it, use it to read novels and comics, and even play (most of the) video games on it.

conver-gence on your phone or computer

The second dimension of convergence culture that Jenkins observes is grassroot convergence. As Jenkins puts it, we are currently witnessing "ever more complex relations between top-down corporate media and bottom-up participatory culture." On the one hand, this means that the line between producers and consumers is becoming blurry. Whereas production and consumption are two distinct, albeit mutually influencing, elements on the circuit of culture in the model developed by du Gay and his co-authors in the late 1990s, they are falling increasingly together in the 21st century. Fans have, of course, contributed to *Star Wars* and other story-worlds from the very beginning. I was a child in the 1980s, and some of my earliest childhood memories revolve around the elaborate battles my brother and I staged with our many *Star Wars* action figures. While these additions remained within the confines of my parents' house, other fans sought to make the films they shot and the fan fiction they wrote available to as many others as possible. For a long time, this was pretty tricky, but the advent of the internet has changed all this. Now, in the age of Web 2.0, fan products enjoy a wide distribution through YouTube, Instagram, TikTok, and other outlets. These days, many fans are "prosumers" – they consume culture and produce culture.

grassroot conver-gence

For the companies that own the copyright to the story-worlds this active fan engagement is both a blessing and a curse. Engaged fans are good consumers and spend a lot of money, but they also raise concerns about copyright and challenge the company's control over the story-world. In a chapter devoted to *Star Wars* in his book on convergence culture, Jenkins examined the uneasy relationship between Lucasfilm and such

active fan engage-ment

fan products, arguing that the company usually condoned parodies and documentaries, but often took measure against the distribution and publication of fan fiction, because it regarded fan fiction as "attempts to expand on the *Star Wars* Universe" and thus as a challenge to the company's control (159).

In recent years, however, fan fiction – on *Star Wars* and other story-worlds – has gone largely unchallenged by the companies that hold the copyright. Its growing cultural acceptance has most probably contributed to it. And so has, without doubt, the negative publicity that companies usually face when they threaten or take legal action against fans who infringe on their copyrights without any commercial interest. When the film company Warner Brothers demanded from teenagers running websites on Harry Potter that they should take them down when the first *Harry Potter* movie was about to be released, this caused such a public outrage that the company eventually backed down. Since then, the rise of social media has given even more power to fans who can garner much support quickly when they feel bullied by media conglomerates.

legal action against fans

Rather than legally regulating fan engagement, media conglomerates have tried to culturally regulate it by incorporating it into their structures and rewarding fan works that they approve of. Once again, Lucasfilm was a forerunner in this regard. Between 2002 and 2012, for example, the company hosted an annual "George Lucas Selects Star Wars Fan Movie Challenge." Only films that played by the rules the company set, that is, films that did not develop the story-world but usually parodied various aspects of the movies, were allowed to enter the competition. In 2007, the first season of *Chad Vader – Day Shift Manager* (2007-12) won the award. Chad Vader (Aaron Yonda), the audience learns early on in the series, is Darth Vader's younger brother. He is the day shift manager at the *Empire* supermarket, and since a bicycle accident he wears a suit like his brother. The show was extremely successful for a fan production. It comprises four seasons of about ten five-to-ten-minute episodes each; it was reported on in the national media, won various prices besides the one bestowed by Lucasfilm, and at its peak, Chad had 50,000 followers on Facebook.

incorpora-tion of fan products

Chad Vader: Day Shift Manager is an extremely clever and funny parody of *Star Wars*. (The episodes are still on YouTube. Watch a few of them!) But it is also a comment on the status of *Star Wars* in U.S. culture, a parody of fan culture and hardcore fandom, and a metaphorical critique of working conditions in the service industry. The show playfully constructs parallels between the evil galactic empire of *Star Wars* and the Empire Market where Chad works to comment on working conditions in the service industry. As we know from many sources, mid-level managers often terrorize their inferiors just as much as Chad tries to terrorize his. Confined within the safe generic conventions of comedy, the show can make light of his frequent attempts to spy on, intimidate, and discipline them. But the intertextual references, especially in the first episodes, to how his older brother Darth deals with employees that have failed him only once in *The Empire Strikes Back* (1983), can be read as a critique of the hire and fire mentality of many American businesses.

Chad Vader: Day Shift Manager

mutually be-
neficial ex-
changes

Significantly, there were several mutually beneficial exchanges between Lucasfilm and the makers of the show, between the corporation and the grassroots fans. Lucasfilm let Matt Sloan and Aaron Yonda, the makers of *Chad Vader*, develop the show and did not take legal action. It even bestowed cultural capital (see chapter 5 for a definition) on them by giving them an award. In turn, Sloan and Yonda did not interfere with the company's storytelling. For a while, Sloan and Yonda even had an online store where they sold *Chad Vader* t-shirts and similar goods. In 2008, Sloan was hired by Lucasarts, the branch of the company that produces video games, to do the voice of Darth Vader for *The Force Unleashed* (2008). He was probably cheaper and more easily available than James Earl Jones – the voice of Darth Vader in the films and most computer games up to that point. Both sides, then, gained from the arrangement.

*Spider-Man:
Across the
Spider-Verse*

If 2008 sounds like ancient history to you, here's another, far more recent example. I am writing this chapter in early July 2023. The biggest blockbuster of the summer so far is *Spider-Man: Across the Spider-Verse* (2023). The film contains an animated Lego scene – a nod by the producers to the Lego movie versions that invariably get made for each live-action blockbuster these days. But the scene in *Spider-Man* was not animated by the professionals who did the Lego movies, but by a fourteen year old boy who had previously only done fan films that he published online (Holub). Since the *Spider-Man* films are all in some way about teenagers rising above themselves to save the world, the producers considered the boy the perfect choice. And he produced the whole scene in his room in his parents' house, just as he had produced his fan films before.

the circuit of
culture

Cases like this raise questions about how valid the model of the circuit of culture still is because it separates production and consumption as strictly as identity and regulation. Well, since I used it to structure this book, I am obviously convinced that it still holds great value for doing Cultural Studies. After all, we should not overemphasize that production and consumption are as far apart from each other in the graphic representation of the model as regulation and identity are. As I stressed in the introduction, models are rather abstract graphic representations that stress some aspects and neglect others. The fact that the relationship between production and consumption has changed in the digital age does not invalidate the model of the circuit of culture. In fact, the model is flexible enough to accommodate the merging of production and consumption in some areas of contemporary culture. I will therefore not use the conclusion to design a circuit of culture 2.0, but to address a topic I have so far avoided to address explicitly: the politics of Cultural Studies.

Questions for Self-Study

1. Take a text – in the broader sense – of your choice and apply the five definitions of popular culture to it. What comes into focus, what gets out of focus?
2. I have talked about quick tests and the metaphor of the wave during the pandemic. What other visualizations were important during the pandemic (in Germany or a country of your choice)?
3. Take an object of your choice and analyze it. Consider all five elements of the circuit of culture.
4. Check out https://archiveofourown.org, currently the largest collection of fan fiction online. What is it that fans are doing with the story-worlds like *Star Wars* or *The Hunger Games*? Why might the copyright owners be unhappy with that sometimes?

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12 Conclusion: The Politics of Cultural Studies

Here are, in no particular order, some of the concepts that I considered but that eventually didn't make it into the book: microaggression, habitus, stigma, taboo, the abject, global vs. local, globalization, glocalization, contact zone, migration, diaspora, mobility, multiculturalism, cosmopolitanism, time, temporality, cold cultures, hot cultures, settler colonialism, coloniality, decoloniality, print culture, digital culture, affect, emotion, and strategic essentialism. Many more could be added to this list. But as I said at the very beginning, I wanted to take seriously the idea that this book is an introduction. Much more could and indeed should be learned about Cultural Studies than what is covered in this book. However, I hope that the book has provided you with a solid foundation on which you can build in future classes. On these final pages I want to address a topic that could be described as the elephant in the room (or in the book, for that matter): the politics of Cultural Studies. In my lecture course, I address this issue in the very first session; here I have left it until the very end.

As I wrote in the very first paragraph of this book, one reason why I enjoy teaching "Introduction to Cultural Studies" is that the class has the potential to change students' lives. And I know from the anonymous evaluations and other forms of feedback that quite a few of my students are deeply affected by the class. They begin to see the world differently, and they understand themselves differently – and better. They love the lecture. However, other students dislike the lecture, or, at the very least, see it much less positively. They feel challenged and threatened and think that I am deliberately pushing a political agenda.

Well, I am not – at least as little as possible. In fact, as Cultural Studies scholars go, I am probably rather conservative. Unlike many of my colleagues, I think of myself as a scholar, not as an activist, and I think that scholarship and activism can and should be separated as far as possible. But if you take seriously the theories that define the field, it's impossible to be really conservative. If you take seriously the insight that meaning, truth, gender, sexuality, race, taste, memory, and many other things that we often regard as given or even natural are culturally constructed, it is impossible not to notice ongoing structural discrimination and exploitation and not be an advocate of radical equality in all areas of life and for all people – from race relations to trans identities. As my colleague Russ West-Pavlov, whom I have quoted once before, said when he did the lecture course a few years ago, Cultural Studies always sides with the oppressed.

Cultural Studies thus is not neutral. It is closely aligned with leftwing politics, with progressive political agendas, rather than conservative ones. This is in line with the political identities of most students in the humanities, and they therefore have no problem with the political implications of the lecture course. They may struggle with the content of the lecture (and this book) intellectually, but not with its political

concepts that didn't make it into the book

political agenda

impossibility to be really conservative

Cultural Studies is not neutral

implications. On the contrary, for them, the lecture often serves the function of confirming what they believed intuitively before they took the class. But other students have political views that are at odds with the tenets and insights of Cultural Studies. As I already mentioned when I discussed Foucault's concept of power in chapter 3, they often tell me what they think I want to hear in the exam in order to pass. But others drop out of the class, and some even switch to a different subject altogether. At the end of the day, it's impossible to be really conservative and take the theories of Cultural Studies seriously.

It is therefore not at all surprising that the rise of rightwing populism and authoritarianism in western democracies in recent years – in the United States, but also in many other countries – has led to a backlash against the theories at the heart of the field. For an increasing number of people on the right, the insight that gender is not naturally given but culturally constructed not only fails to adequately reflect reality. It is also seen as a sinister tool to challenge and transform an allegedly natural order of things for the worse. By the same token, critical race theory, the study of how race is culturally constructed and how structural racism endures, is perceived as a strategy to oppress White people.

If this sounds like a conspiracy theory, that is because such criticism often assumes the form of one. In its most extreme version, popular in Hungary and Poland as much as in the United States, it is all blamed on a devious plot by a group called "Cultural Marxists." The thinkers of the Frankfurt School and their successors, this conspiracy theory goes, developed their theories only to destroy society as we know it and as it should be. But even when it is not downright conspiracist, the resistance to the insights of Cultural Studies can have very practical and palpable consequences. While I was writing this book, there were numerous reports in the media that books that allegedly promote homosexuality or queer identities were banned from school libraries in the United States. In the state of Florida as well as in some other countries, it is by now forbidden for educators to teach children (either those below a certain age or all of them, depending on the specific regulations) about gender identities and sexualities.

The bleak irony of such laws and other forms of regulation is of course that they implicitly acknowledge the validity of the constructionist approach (while outwardly rejecting it). Trying to ensure that children are not taught about non-heteronormative gender identities and sexualities only makes sense if one assumes that such identities are shaped by the cultural environment, by what people say, by the books we read, and the films we watch. If it was just a matter of biology, what happens in a classroom or what is represented in the media should have no effect whatsoever on people. From a progressive leftwing perspective, such measures are of course a desperate attempt to turn back the wheel of time and to undo developments such as the growing acceptance of queer identities. But that does not make them less dangerous, and they need to be closely watched and resisted.

At the same time, Cultural Studies should also preserve some degree of critical distance towards certain forms of identity politics. "Identity politics means, of course," as Simon During explains, "a politics engaged on behalf of those with particular identities (usually historically disempowered ones) rather than a politics organised on the basis of particular social policies or philosophies" (147). While there is obviously nothing wrong with supporting historically oppressed groups – indeed, it is what we all should do – identity politics often downplays constructivism and essentializes the identities it seeks to promote. Thus, identity politics often works by exclusion. In its more extreme forms, it does not unite, but divide. Moreover, it often focuses on identities based on gender, sexuality, and race, which has the effect of downplaying the aspect of class and the materialistic base of exploitation, oppression, and discrimination. Cultural Studies can and should serve as a corrective in such cases.

identity politics

However, with such considerations we have left the scope of an Introduction to Cultural Studies finally far behind. These topics are so complicated that my cursory treatment hardly does them justice. They would deserve to be treated in a book of its own, but I will not be the one to write it.

Works Cited

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BUCHTIPP

Rolf Kreyer

The Linguistic Toolkit for Teachers of English

Discovering the Value of Linguistics for Foreign Language Teaching

ARTIKEL-VORSCHAU GEWI, WIRT & TECHNIK

In contrast to literary or cultural studies linguistics is not taught in the EFL classroom, yet, it plays a major role in any English language teaching degree. Given this discrepancy it does not come as a surprise that students sometimes ask: "I want to be a teacher! Why do I need all this?" The main goal of this textbook is to demonstrate the relevance of linguistic expertise for the EFL classroom. It explores a wide range of topics (phonetics/phonology, lexis, corpus linguistics, text linguistics and the power of language) with a clear focus on providing a convincing answer to the question above. With its highly accessible style and layout, a wealth of examples and exercises as well as a large range of additional innovative online materials this textbook sets out to convince its readers that they will be better teachers if they are good linguists.

Today, virtually all BA programs in English at German universities place a strong focus on Cultural Studies. However, textbooks that introduce first-year students to the subject are rare, and the few existing ones are too complicated or not comprehensive enough. By contrast, this textbook introduces the key theories and concepts of Cultural Studies systematically and thoroughly. It puts particular emphasis on their application, aiming to enable students to do their own analyses of cultural artefacts and practices. The author draws on many examples, mostly taken from American culture, but in each chapter, he applies the ideas introduced to *The Hunger Games* franchise and the coronavirus pandemic to show how different theories can lead to very different interpretations of the same phenomenon. Each chapter ends with exercises that allow students to apply what they have learned.

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