

I. The Cultural Net

The Basic Metaphor

0.—As to the metaphorical nature of my central concept, the cultural net, I shall skip the obligatory reference to Nietzsche⁹⁴ and leave it at saying that scholarly theory cannot do without the “transference” of terms from one semantic field to another, which is precisely the meaning of *metaphora* in Ancient Greek. The point which in fact needs to be carefully discussed when one suggests the introduction of a new metaphor is whether it is illuminating and productive for an understanding of the phenomena at issue, or whether it produces misleading lines of thought.

1.—I shall begin with some negative delimitations. As to the term “cultural net”, one could think of alternatives, the “cultural web” or the “cultural grid” being those which come quite close to what I wish to convey. The reason for having discarded them lies mainly in the fact that their associative potential is all too fraught with materiality, that is, with the idea of a physically stable infrastructure. This is evident for the term “grid”, but it also applies to some extent to the concept of a web, which derives from the verb “to weave” and evokes the structure of a spiderweb. The motive for choosing the metaphor of the net is its being relatively emancipated from the idea of a material basis that *necessarily* exists permanently; this associative potential of the net metaphor as I wish to understand it is a sort of spin-off of its current use within IT contexts.⁹⁵

The affinity of this book’s central metaphor to terms and concepts that emerged in the electronic age is, however, a relative one. One difference between the Internet and the cultural net as theorized here⁹⁶ is the speed of circulation and, as a consequence, the dramatically increased possibility of spreading and of accessing information, which is also linked to the fact that material circulating on the Internet is available everywhere, or at least in all places penetrable by

94 “What is truth? a mobile army of metaphors, metonyms, anthropomorphisms [...] which were poetically and rhetorically heightened, transferred [...] and after long use seem solid, canonical, and binding [...]” (*On Truth and Lies in an Extra-Moral Sense* [1873]; translation according to: Friedrich Nietzsche, *On Rhetoric and Language*, Sander L. Gilman, Carole Blair and David J. Parent [eds.], New York, NY 1989, p. 250).

95 In the next chapter, I shall address in more detail the question of what differentiates the net I have in mind from more traditional network structures.

96 —setting aside the fact that what floats in the Internet requires an even broader conceptualization of culture than the material under scrutiny in this book.

radio waves. In the case of the cultural net as understood in this book, every process of mediation is linked to the direct or indirect, but in any case physical presence of a mediating human mind or of a (physical) cultural item produced by a human mind. At first sight, such a description seems to convey that the cultural net might be a site of restricted or limited circulation when compared to the Internet. What may counterbalance the (seemingly) restricted or limited circulation capacities of “pre-IT” network structures that make use of symbolic encoding is the possibility of what in actual IT structures is extremely rare, if only for reasons of the enormous quantity of circulating material: the pattern of fortuitous, contingent, totally un-preconceived, but nevertheless meaningful encounters. On the Internet, a recipient must consciously search for a certain material; otherwise he or she will get lost in the immense ocean of information. In the cultural net, the information actually transmitted is always linked to a “filter” constituted by the one human mind (or his products) serving as a transporting device. Since these “transporters” won’t communicate with just anyone, but with a selection of other human minds, serendipity, meaning, the chance (not the necessity) that a culturally relevant result of a contingent contact between two units will emerge, may be much greater than in the case of a recipient surfing the Internet and gathering random information.

In qualitative terms, however, the similarities between IT networks and what I suggest calling the cultural net seem quite striking. They concern first of all the non-necessity of a stable and permanent material net structure and the ensuing characteristics already partially mentioned above.⁹⁷ Flexibility, the ease of rami-

⁹⁷ It is mainly this feature which led me to discard a number of further metaphorical constructs proposed in previous scholarship which I will not discuss here in detail. As an example, I shall briefly mention Peter Burke’s “hydraulic model” for describing the way in which Renaissance culture floated to all regions of Europe (*The European Renaissance: Centers and Peripheries*, Oxford 1998; quote: p. 6). Would it be sensible to use this metaphor to describe the floating of cultural material into the remote valleys of the Alps, which one would have to assume to be an “uphill” movement (see Bernhart, *Volksschauspiele*)? And what about the idea of a hydraulic mediation device leading from Paris to Saint Petersburg (see Ospovat, *Terror and Pity*)? If one admitted that the Baltic Sea, and the rudimentary road system existing in that age, were part of the structure, the entire approach would perhaps be less counterintuitive than it actually is; but including such varying material substrates would bring the entire idea quite close to my suggestion of a virtual, rather than a physical configuration of cultural network structures, that is, to a conceptualization that contrasts with Burke’s theorizing. This said, I am ready to concede that such more “materialistic” metaphors were useful insofar as they helped liberate the discussions revolving around processes of cultural exchange from the aura of the numinous and arcane that surrounds them in more traditional contexts. And I should add that Burke renders his initial terms more flexible in the course of the investigation (“[...] the channels, networks or groups through which the process of reception took place” [p. 10]).

fyng into distant and remote regions, a non-hierarchical conformation, and the (relative) difficulty of exerting control over the circulating material are the main commonalities deriving from this feature. All of these characteristics may also be found in net structures that date from the pre-electronic age, for example in postal transport systems, which seem to have existed as structures consciously set up and maintained since the inception of written culture in the high civilizations of the Euphrates. But even digital encoding, be it by way of traditional script or by way of radio waves, does not seem to be an indispensable prerequisite for virtual network structures as described above. It is symbolic encoding as such, in more current terms: language, which does seem to be such a necessary prerequisite. Language enables the “saving” of cultural items of any kind in the structures of human brains. As soon as the bodies these brains are part of set themselves in motion and communicate what has been saved in their minds to other beings capable of symbolic interaction, there are instantiations of what is here called the cultural net.—This delimitation entails that such networks do not exist in the non-human world, a “fact” substantiated by the simple observation that there is no culture in the world of non-humans, no *colere*—that is, no systematic and progressive⁹⁸ alteration of the nature-given habitat.

2.—Cultural material may float in the net, as already said in passing, in the mode of entire, finite works (paintings, statues, scores, texts). “Below” this level, components of texts⁹⁹ (motifs, personages, particularly well-conceived

98 It is, in the first place, this latter feature which differentiates humans from those animals who also transform their natural habitat in order to customize it according to their needs (birds, beavers, etc.). The fact that their “cultural” activities are the exact repetition of what previous generations of their species did testifies to the assumption that there is nothing in the animal world that corresponds to what I here call the cultural network, which is, in essence, a huge virtual container of all forms of interaction between humans and nature (including humans and humans), whose content is accessible in principle to all members of the species and actually accessed (“withdrawn from the net”) in order to generate new forms of interaction between humans and nature. The cumulative effects characterizing human culture (“development”; “progress”) are only able to take place in case individuals have access to patterns of customizing the natural habitat which transcend what they can learn by imitating their parents.

99 —or of images, or of pieces of music. As said, books like the present one are in need of benevolent readers. My primary field of application for the theoretical frame here developed is literature, that is, cultural products sedimented as texts. For this reason, I draw illustrating remarks above all from this “field” of culture, while neglecting, for convenience’s sake, to formulate analogous remarks that would refer to visual art and music. This said, I should like to stress once again that these non-linguistic cultural practices and the production of concrete works obey a logic which may, *mutatis mutandis*, not be all that dissimilar from the one described above. In a nutshell: it is my claim that the metaphor of culture as a (virtual) net applies at least to all artistic production (if not also to phenomena such as religion, science, techniques of power, etc.).

formulations [*dicta*]) may be items integrated into the floating process. “Above” this level, cultural material may float as formal concepts, partly rhetorical, partly generic, whose components—that is, specific tropes and topoi, or the range of *procédés* ascribed to the genre of tragedy in Aristotle’s *Poetics*, e.g., peripety or anagnorisis—may likewise float on their own. On an even higher level of abstraction, one may identify the floating of world-modeling concepts linked to certain texts or genres, such as, in the case just mentioned, the “tragic vision” of life as doomed to (unredeemable) failure, which may be expressed by texts whose formal shaping differs from Aristotle’s definition of the genre of tragedy—one may think of certain pieces by Samuel Beckett—but also from the genre as such—one might think of Baudelaire’s famous poem *A une passante* (1855/1857). Finally—and this may be the most abstract level of culturally relevant material floating in the net—it may be enabling structures which float and are thus transferred from one cultural community to another. These are institutions that favor the production of concrete cultural material, but are not linked to any specific variant of such material. They serve as incubators for creative processes. As to culture *sensu lato*, one could point to schools, universities, and academies.

I would like to come back in more detail to the question of the standardization of the material floating in the net and to the related question of the actual items floating. One could argue that the circulating material—at least if one limits to texts the domain with respect to which one claims the metaphor to be valid¹⁰⁰—is just as standardized as electricity. The elementary units, the “waves” or “particles”, would in this case be the letters; script is indeed a variant of digitization. But such a radical use of my central metaphor would deprive it of its descriptive adequacy. Casting the “cultural net” as consisting in the fluctuation of an inventory of letters would lead to a view of cultural production as ironically displayed in Borges’s *La biblioteca de Babel* (1941); texts would be a random combination of elementary digital units which make sense only in some very rare cases. In addition, emphasizing digitization to such an extent would exclude all possible discussions of the extent to which the approach here suggested might be useful for non-digitized cultural items, that is, items of visual culture; the mere fact that drama as theater comprises such non-digitized variants renders it necessary to refrain from consistently linking the metaphor here suggested to frames that are current in present-day IT structures.

100 That is, if we exclude paintings for a while.

If culture and text production are conceived not as a combinatory algorithm, but, rather, as a conscious and intention-driven or a sub-conscious human activity, one is led to postulate that items floating in such a net need to be identifiable or recognizable by humans. This claim is evident for ready-made texts, so-called “works”. The crucial question is that of the extent to which one may proceed to more elementary units and still be reasonably entitled to say that there is something specific, namely, a unit, that is floating in the net, and not some random string of letters or digits. Provisionally, I am inclined to hold that what are called “motifs” and “characters” are the most elementary units to be considered, at least when we are discussing that specific variant of cultural production we are used to calling literature. But it is not to be excluded that even parts of motifs and specific traits constituting a character may be taken into consideration. As an illustration of the latter case, I should like to point to the personage of Hamlet. The combination of “hesitancy” (content) and “centrality” (hierarchical status) may suffice in order to constitute a unit floating in the net. In common language: a writer may draw from Shakespeare’s text the inspiration to create a central personage whose character is mainly informed by hesitance, without adopting for his newly created character the full range of further traits constituting in their entirety what is said about Hamlet in Shakespeare’s play. To continue this line of reasoning, one could hypothesize that even single characteristics assignable to personages may constitute units capable of floating, since it is possible to create, on the basis of material available in the net from the moment Shakespeare devised the eponymous hero of his greatest play, a non-central, secondary personage whose main trait is hesitancy and inertia; one might think, for instance, of Innstetten, Effi Briest’s husband, in Theodor Fontane’s most famous novel.

I should like to highlight explicitly that, starting no later than with Plato and Aristotle, it is not only literary texts and their components that constitute the material circulating in the net. It is at the same time the theoretical reflections at the basis of these texts that may be found in the virtual net: e.g., devices in a broad sense, including all sorts of generic concepts, but also formal rules and regulations, aesthetic concepts, functional ascriptions, rhetorical patterns, etc.

3.—Making cultural items apt for circulation requires in any case a sort of encoding. As already emphasized, this need not be a written encoding (texts or scores); but on the other hand, one should not underestimate the fact that written encoding and its various technological realizations—hand-written texts, printed texts, electronically recorded texts—are the most effective means to accelerate the spread of cultural material in the net, since they make its movement at least partly independent from the movements of actual humans.

If there is no such written encoding, the processes of circulation must necessarily be operated by actually moving human beings.

The point just made triggers the question of whether it is, indeed, only material shaped according to notational (non-compact) encoding,¹⁰¹ specifically verbalized material, that is able to float in the net on levels of organization below the one of the integral work. It is evident that actual paintings and statues as well as musical works may be conceived of as floating in a net as here understood, but it is questionable whether they are able to do so other than at the level of the finite work. Is it conceivable that “styles”, artistic or non-artistic (styles of painting, musical styles, features of body language, etc.), travel as such in the net? And is it possible that they travel—as is a potentiality for everything articulated in language—in a conceptual fashion only, or is everything cultural yet not articulated by way of the discreet arbitrary code always bound to certain material realizations in order to be able to travel? Is it conceivable that a new dress style¹⁰² travels without the movement of actual people wearing it? Is it conceivable that the new and refined body language practiced at table at the French court and introduced on the initiative of the two Medici princesses married off to French kings or heirs to the throne would have gained terrain without the very material cutlery transported by the princesses in their baggage when they traveled from Florence to Paris? And is it possible to imagine the circulation of features of body language without traveling humans who demonstrated to people in Berlin or Saint Petersburg how a distinguished per-

101 I here refer to Nelson Goodman’s categories (*Languages of Art: An Approach to a Theory of Symbols*, Indianapolis, IN 1968). I do not follow Goodman’s highly illuminating theoretical model with regard to the relation between text and music (see in detail my “Einige Überlegungen zu Musik und Sprache”, *Zeitschrift für Ästhetik und Allgemeine Kunstwissenschaft* vol. 51/2006, pp. 9–41). Music and texts share, indeed, the characteristic of non-compact encoding; but music as system lacks the intermediary level of what we call “words” with regard to texts. A musical composition is a combination of standardized sounds (notes); a text is a composition of standardized units (words) consisting of standardized sounds. These intermediate sound-combinations are defined as units by their being semanticized. As a consequence, texts may be decomposed into more elementary units which may float in the net on their own. In the case of musical works, this is not a systematically given dimension; it occurs only in very rare, isolated cases (the destiny motif of Beethoven’s Fifth Symphony would be an example). Usually, musical works (like paintings) float in the net as integral items only. The “fragments” into which they may be decomposed, and which may float in addition to the integral works, are not fragments in the literal sense, but abstractions, general formal principles, which vary from the highly abstract (polyphony or homophony) to the epoch-bound (sonata form).

102 For instance, men wearing long pants, a style which arose only after the French Revolution, and which seems to vanish, at least in summer, in our present-day age, with its predilection for the “very casual”.

son moves, laughs, frowns (etc.) at the Parisian court? I will leave it at raising these questions without proposing definitive answers. I am a literary scholar by training, so my views may be biased by what I have been doing for decades now. Without being an expert in the field, it is my impression that non-verbal cultural items do float in the cultural net, but in a much less flexible and rapid manner than in the case of textual material, because their floating, based as it is on analogue rather than arbitrary sign systems, is linked to a human substratum displaying or actually transporting them.

It is an implication of this hypothesis that the situation changes radically as soon as the technology of notational encoding of analogue symbolic communication¹⁰³ emerges in the electronic age. There is an important predecessor to this development in the age of “simple”, analogue duplication: once the technique of shooting and displaying photographs and films was invented, there was no need for humans to travel to distant places in order to discover new styles of body language. It may even be the case that, at least for some time into the future, the species’ cultural development will pay more attention to those features of culture whose more general propagation was discouraged heretofore because of their purely analogue encoding, and which have nowadays become as easy to disseminate as was the case with texts in former times.¹⁰⁴

4.—But what is it that makes the material contained in the net float; what is it that keeps it moving? Thinking again and again about the point made in the introduction, namely that the circulation of cultural material is “in most cases” effected by humans, I am ready to postulate that the formulation “is in *all* cases effected by humans” would not be misconceived. To circulate conceptual forms, one must have human brains to store them, and these brains need human bodies that circulate, thereby causing the circulation of the concepts stored or recorded in them. Material forms—books, paintings, statues—most evidently need humans (sailors, riders, pilots, postmen, etc.) in order to be transported, even if those who do so are not aware of what they are transport-

103 The terminology is obviously, once again, Goodman’s (*Languages of Art*).

104 My above remarks are meant to apply to music as well, although its reduced circulation in the past was not primarily contingent upon the mode of encoding, but, as explained above (n. 101), on its internal structuration. As to music, there is no intermediate stage of “simple” duplication, but there was likewise no need for such a stage. Since music is (already) notational, it sufficed to transfer it to an easily multipliable and transportable notationally organized medium (discs) in order to drastically increase the circulation of finite musical works in the net even before the inception of the IT era.

ing. And in the case of the present-day electronic circulation of cultural material via the Internet, it would mean falling prey to mythical concepts if one postulated that such circulation occurs “autonomously” or “automatically”.¹⁰⁵ The infrastructure (the Internet) is created by humans; the encoding as well as the decoding devices (“computers”) are man-made; electric energy on whose availability the floating processes are contingent does not originate from modern descendants of a figure like Prometheus, but needs to be produced by humans. The only difference consists in the fact that not even one of the seven billion members of the species needs to transport her or his body in order to provide access to cultural material circulated via the Internet. The “novelty” is quantitative. The speed of transfer increases dramatically, the quantity of material that is able to be conveyed increases dramatically, and the cost of transfer decreases dramatically. It remains to be seen whether this quantitative “leap” will lead to cultural phenomena whose theorization would lie beyond this book’s theoretical frame.

5.—The most difficult point to be tackled in view of the proposed metaphorical field seems to consist in giving a satisfactory answer to the question of the “ontological” status of the cultural net. Is it more of a material phenomenon, or is it merely virtual? I shall leave it to my colleagues in philosophy departments to decide whether my provisional answer—that it seems to be both—is logically viable. The role of mediation device is fulfilled either by human brains (in the case of material circulating in the conceptual mode only) or by material artifacts (in the case of the circulation of items such as paintings, statues, books, or scores). In either case, one is dealing with material “phenomena”. As difficult as it might be to conceptualize what we call the “human mind”, if it is considered as a “container” in which certain ideas, narratives, poetological rules, etc., are stored and then transported as soon as the body sustaining a particular mind sets itself in motion, there is no reason not to consider the mind as a phenomenal entity.—The difficulty which leads me to suggest, for the point in question, the above transgression of basic logical categories emerges when one asks the question of where cultural items are to be found during times of inactivity: forgotten books in libraries; texts in languages no one is able to understand any more (Egyptian hieroglyphics up to the beginning of the nineteenth century), statues or frescoes covered by ashes (Pompeii up to the eighteenth century)—items that exist, but are not made use of, and which may be reactivated even after a long period of inactivity.

105 I remind readers of my above critique of Latour’s mystifications (pp. 5–7).

Yet it is evident that such inactive material can be reactivated only in case there is at least some material substratum preserved, otherwise it would belong to that subset of cultural production that is definitively lost.—The quantity of lost material, however, may be less significant from the vantage point of a network theory of culture than one might at first believe against the backdrop of human history as an endless concatenation of conflict and destruction. Cultural material may never die as long as humans exist. At least in its conceptual form, it may survive even after real-world catastrophes of any kind, though not necessarily in its integrity. Survival may occur in fragments, or on the level of highly condensed imaginary narratives (myths), or on the level of abstract concepts reconverted into narrative (religions). In these forms, it continues to float in the cultural net, even if its actual material realizations on the level of single “works” are destroyed. It remains “available” in principle, that is, at hand for reutilization.

This observation may even provide a solution to the logical dilemma articulated above. The items possibly¹⁰⁶ floating in the net seem to have in all cases the character of material phenomena. What differs is the degree of materiality involved in the process of floating, which varies from matter proper (statues) to material substrates of concepts (books, scores), to transporting devices (bodies, brains) for containers of concepts—that is, minds, whose exact description and “ontological” classification is a task still to be accomplished by the natural sciences. Possible and actual circulation would be differentiated with respect to already existing but inactive material by the same factor as in the case of possible and actual artifacts, namely, by an act to be carried out by a human being who thereby renders the material in question ready for circulation: in the case of the “creation” of an actual artifact, writing down the idea of a text, or executing a painting according to an already existent idea, and then divulging the phenomenal items; in the case of the reactivation of a “forgotten” artifact, reading and talking about a book that has been rediscovered,¹⁰⁷ deciphering the hieroglyphics, or uncovering the remains of Pompeii.

6.—If one provisionally accepts the concept of the net for describing the structure of culture, an important consequential point to be discussed is whether or not the term “circulation” is adequate for the description of the processes oc-

106 With this adverb I want to highlight that they need not float permanently.

107 I am thinking, e.g., of the rediscovery of what was then called the “Oxford Roland”, which occurred in 1835—for nearly eight centuries, the French had been totally ignorant of the text they then started to divulge via the cultural net as their “national” epic and the essence of “francité”.

curing within this net structure. An alternative term that is more neutral as to its implications would be “transfer”, to be understood in a strictly etymological sense, that is, as a “carrying” (Lat. *ferre*) of a specific object from one place to another, more specifically to a place which is separated from the initial site of the object by a (semantic, that is, conceptual) border, so that the “carrying” is considered not just as a movement, but as a significant change of location.—As already mentioned in passing, the problem involved with the term “circulation” primarily consists in the fact that processes of cultural transfer are not in all cases circular. Very frequently, a certain “portion” of cultural material is transposed from one place or context to another, where it becomes recontextualized. In most cases, processes of cultural contact do not, indeed, remain unilateral, even if the partners involved are clearly distinguished within a hierarchy of power or of prestige, as in the cases of England and India or France and Russia in the period at issue here. So a certain “reverse flow” of cultural material is the more or less inevitable implication even of processes of cultural subjugation. But one has to consider the possibility that what flows back is incongruous with what first flowed forth. Processes of transfer might consequently be considered the initiators of processes of circulation, with the qualification, however, that the latter encompass much larger sections of the entire cultural field than the one within which the initial transfer took place. The “exportation” of an instance of high culture may be reciprocated by an importation of a variety of instances of popular culture. The exportation of a text may lead to the importation of various performative practices. And, very frequently, the circulatory process, even if it occurs in the literal sense of the term, is stretched out over time in such a way that the material floating back has undergone substantive changes as a consequence of its having been recontextualized. A paradigm for this latter case would be the “transfer” of late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Russian drama (Chekhov and Tolstoy) to Western Europe, which would not have been possible without the previous transfer of (a Germanized variant of) French court theater to eighteenth-century Russia. But the material flowing back had evolved into a completely new variant of the genre, making its former, imported origins almost unrecognizable. Similarly, it was not in the nineteenth, but only in the second half of the twentieth century that the much more body-oriented cultural practices of traditional Indian performance culture were imported by Western theatrical culture, bringing about a quite radical transformation of the cultural pattern of staged performances which one hundred and fifty years earlier had been “exported” to India in the context of a configuration of imperialism.

To put it in a more abstract way: all processes of circulation occur within the frame of what we call time. One may discuss the question of whether or not a

merely material and lifeless object—e.g., a certain quantity of raw material—still is the same after having performed, or rather undergone, a process of circulation. Any pragmatically reasonable answer to this somewhat sophisticated question would have to take into consideration the amount of time spent on the circulatory movement and the level of organization of the material under scrutiny. The fundamental elements out of which our world is made, the atoms, or rather the particles constituting them, stay stable for very long periods of time. The higher the level of organization, the more the material in question is affected by the time span involved in circulatory processes. Ore is less affected than steel, steel is less affected than a product consisting of steel (for instance, an automobile), and highly organized, but merely material objects are much less affected than cultural items, which only become “objects”—even if they exist as material forms (paintings, written texts)—by being submitted to a process we call decoding or interpretation and which is, on behalf of this feature, always dependent on specific conditions that apply only to the one respective act of reception. —For all of these reasons, it may in principle be questionable to make use of the term “circulation”, since it implies that what finally gets back to where it came from is, at least in substance, still the same as when the circulatory process was initiated.

It follows from the points just made that the problem is to a certain extent liable to variations contingent upon the perspective from which the cultural scenario in question is viewed. If not systematically, one would at least from a pragmatic perspective consider the points mentioned above as almost negligible in case the scenario consists of one specific linguistic community within a rather short time span. With regard to late sixteenth- and early seventeenth-century English dramatic and theatrical culture, it certainly does make sense to consistently apply the concept of circulation when describing processes of cultural activity occurring within this frame.¹⁰⁸ If, however, the scenario at stake is all of Europe; if, in addition, the historical period in question is the one in which Europe extended its power and culture over the entire globe; and if, thirdly, the processes observed cannot be limited to the period primarily considered, since they triggered medium- and long-term reverse effects, it may be less adequate to indiscriminately¹⁰⁹ apply the concept of circulation.

108 The reference here is obviously to the research done by Greenblatt on Shakespearean drama and theater.

109 —which implies that (as may be extrapolated from my formulations so far) in many *specific* cases the term of circulation might reasonably be made use of.

At least provisionally, the phenomena of cultural dynamics considered within this book, as well as the questions at issue here, seem to speak for the suitability of the suggested metaphor of the net. Within networks, movements of mere transport or transfer may occur. There may also be circulatory movements. And, most importantly, there may be indirect circular movements, that is, processes which take place only because there have been previous processes of movement, while the latter do not have any “organic” or content-bound relation to the former. The main descriptive and explanatory achievement of the metaphor proposed seems to be that it does not refer to specific configurations of procedural instantiations, but rather describes a structure enabling a large variety of such processes to take place.

Nodes and Contact Zones

0.—Readers will have realized at this point that my approach implies not only a critical, but also a polemical stance vis-à-vis the traditional concept of “national literature”; in Part III, there will be a detailed discussion of the underlying assumptions.¹¹⁰ If one rejects the notion of an essentially compartmentalized cultural and literary “landscape”, there remains, however, the question of how to conceptualize the trans-“national” structures within which the “transculturation” of items originally related to one specific cultural framework actually does take place. There are two existing approaches to the question which require some attention, not only with respect to their differences, but also with respect to their basic commonalities, which will be the points I will be arguing against from the vantage point of my theoretical metaphor.

1.—The first one, propagated by leftist cultural theory and taking—according to its Marxist basis—a globalized stance towards the question of cultural production, differentiates between center and periphery, while inverting the traditional evaluative hierarchy linked to these terms. But does this argumentative pattern have any relevance beyond the political sphere from which it is derived? There are many examples which are contrary to the assumption—which has become a sort of standard indicator of “political correctness”—that artifacts created by the “subaltern”, by people residing at the “periphery”, or by people belonging to “minorities” of various profile, are by necessity “better” than artifacts created by aristocratic or middle-class people from the Western

¹¹⁰ See pp. 232–250.

metropolises who do not belong to a minority or for whom belonging to a minority is without significant importance as regards their self-description.¹¹¹

On the other hand, from my theoretical perspective, positions diametrically opposed to leftist cultural theory, the most prominent one in recent times being Pascale Casanova's,¹¹² seem questionable as well, though not to the same extent. The positive characteristic of Casanova's theory which needs to be mentioned is that her criterion of quality is not explicitly ideological in the sense of an unveiled partisan profile, but, rather, descriptive. It is the good old parameter of success and impact, which, of course, is not totally free of ideological implications. It has its roots in Calvinist theology.¹¹³ A leftist critique would object—in congruence with Marx's *dictum* "The ideas of the ruling class are [...] the ruling ideas"¹¹⁴—that it is not astonishing to see great powers promote their cultural products and try to spread them. But the limitations of Marx's famous formula become apparent when taking into consideration the at times tremendous impact of texts that do not derive from imperial centers and their cultural agents—the most prominent example being the Bible—and also of texts that originate from former centers which have lost their metropolitan status in the course of history (classical Greek texts in Roman times, *matière de Bretagne* texts after the destruction of Celtic culture and its sites, etc.).

Casanova's basically descriptive approach enables her to see what leftist theory has to relegate to the background on behalf of its own premises: "great" works

111 If there were a discussion between leftist cultural theoreticians and the (small) rest of scholars who work in the field—in fact, there is none—it would quickly turn out that the entire controversy is about what the term "better" might mean. From the standpoint of partisans of "revolution", every deed, work, etc. that favors the expected revolutionary process is "good", while everything that emblemizes an indifferent or even a reactionary or retrograde tendency is "bad". So, finally, there is no discussion necessary; it suffices to agree that political convictions differ and that everyone writes for his or her own audience.

112 *The World Republic of Letters*, M. B. DeBevoise (tr.), Cambridge, MA and London 2004.

113 Calvinism is a derivative of theological nominalism as described in this book on various occasions: if God's will cannot be legitimately extrapolated from Scripture, since He is free to change it, it can, however, be abstracted from what has happened, since even God is not able to change the past. The believer whose life has been successful can be sure that he has lived in accordance with God's will. The future, however, is open. For this reason, the devout Calvinist does (nearly) everything and anything to stay successful in the present as well, and he does this until the end of his life. Abstracted from its theological horizon and thus fit to be adopted by worshippers of other religions, as well as by agnostics and atheists, Calvinism is the ideological basis of US-American society, down to the minute details of everyday behavior, such as body language.

114 See *Die deutsche Ideologie* (1845), in: *Marx-Engels Werke*, 43 vols., Berlin [GDR] 1956–1990, vol. 3, p. 35.

may originate indiscriminately from “centers” as well as from “peripheries”, and they may be conceived by members of an elite as well as by members of the marginalized strata of a given social community. Her insistence on the indispensable role and function of “centers” and on cultural rituals like “consecration” might be, however, informed to a problematic extent by her culture of origin—which is, to date, a secular analogue of the structural features of the Roman Catholic Church.¹¹⁵

As far as net theories are concerned, metropolises have come to be qualified by the metaphor of the “node”.¹¹⁶ In addition, there is the concept of “contact zones”,¹¹⁷ which to my knowledge has not been adapted to the vocabulary of the net as yet. What the two concepts have in common is the assumption that there are privileged sites of cultural production as well as less privileged ones. The concept of the contact zone may be conceived of as a supplement to Casanova’s theory as well as to the dominant leftist theories. It provides answers to the question of how people (in this case authors) or texts from the periphery might get access to the metropole, that is, to the places where “consecration” may happen or where they might enter the radius of attention of the “revolutionary intellectuals” who typically reside in the metropolises.

2.—I shall not attempt to contest the existence of such nodes, nor challenge the idea of contact zones. In the early modern age, cities like Paris, Madrid, and London were immensely important sites of cultural production. And I have already had the occasion to stress that geographical and cultural regions of unstable and fluctuating status, such as early modern Italy—a country where Spanish, German, and French cultures literally met, a “zone” where “contacts” actually happened—held a prominent role in terms of literary, specifically dramatic production. The point in question is whether such places and regions are automatically favored and, if so, in what exactly the privilege consists.

My skeptical attitude towards the concepts of nodes and contact zones¹¹⁸ starts from the observation that they are both inspired by variants of network struc-

115 I have to admit that my approach may be conditioned, perhaps even a bit more than useful, by my background, that is, a “cultural nation” that is basically polycentric and whose borders are not congruent with political borders, in essence a somewhat “fluid” and unstable entity. I thus consider my remarks to be just one further facet that might be added to a debate with those who are ready to engage in mutual intellectual exchange.

116 See Vilashini Cooppan, “Codes for World Literature: Network Theory and the Imaginary Field”, in: Joachim Küpper (ed.), *Approaches to World Literature*, Berlin 2013, pp. 103–119.

117 First introduced by Mary Louise Pratt (*Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation*, London 1992).

118 As suggested above, I consider both concepts to be specific instantiations of an overarching concept of “privileged zones”.

tures which have a stable physical substratum. There are, of course, such nodes in road and railroad networks, in electricity grids, and in canal systems, as well as in nets constructed for communication purposes. But as to the latter variant, the privileged status of nodes exists only in the case of the—as I shall call them—classical communication networks, such as caravanserais, postal systems, telephone systems, and broadcast systems. The metaphorical resource for my attempt at theorizing the problems at issue is, however, the present-day web, the Internet, which seems not to have attained its definitive structure as yet. As far as I understand it, certain nodal centers (servers) are necessary, at least at the present (2016) stage of technological development, in order to keep the information in the net circulating. But there seems to be one major difference with respect to the role nodes held in previous information-net structures. There is (still) the need for a physical, material basis in order to uphold the circulation processes. The “nodes”, however, can quite easily be substituted by other ones, or by a connection between a few other ones, in case they are inactivated (when destroyed by an enemy force, or switched off by the power that controls the specific node). This difference dramatically affects the profile of data flow in such a net. Nodes become de-territorialized and “ephemeralized”; circulation is facilitated; control becomes difficult. This holds true for the information circulated as well as for the information extracted from the net. I do not want to endorse the somewhat naïve picture of a world of unrestricted communication propounded by some IT proponents. But there is no denying that the present day electronic web has changed things with respect to an era in which it sufficed to control or destroy one central point of a road or railroad network, of a post system or of a telephone or broadcast network, in order to regulate, inhibit, or even interrupt the flow of items for a considerable time. What is taking place today is certainly not a complete “de-materialization” of the web; it might just be a huge and very rapidly taken step within a long process of de-materialization of man-made nets, which is so significant that we sense its consequences more immediately than in former times characterized by a very slow decrease of network physicality.¹¹⁹

119 I hope that what I wish to convey is not all too cryptic. In the case of traditional networks, too, it was possible to replace nodes that were destroyed or came under enemy control. It is possible to replace the pumping device which regulates the flow of a canal system; but to do that takes time. It is possible to replace a central railroad station, or the crossing of several different motorways, or a central post office, or the operators’ headquarters of an old-fashioned telephone system. But in all these cases, the material, physical work to be done is significant, and the time it takes to make the replacement effectual is considerable. This said, there is a decreasing line with respect to both parameters according to technological progress and the concrete inventions linked to it; it takes much more effort to repair a centrally damaged canal system than to repair the headquarters of a telephone system. But the truly important

3.—This recent technological development might provide a more adequate metaphor for describing the processes of cultural transfer and exchange under discussion here. The commonalities seem to consist in two points of distinct order: firstly, cultural nets as here theorized differ from traditional information networks in that they do not rely on one specific material mediation device, but rather on a wide range of highly diverse vehicles; as to physicality in the strict sense, this feature also distinguishes them from present-day IT networks, since the latter make use of one specific physical medium only, namely, radio waves or electricity. In terms of structure, it is this feature that endows cultural networks with exactly that extremely high flexibility which is characteristic of electronic networks in contrast to previous matter-bound network systems—which derives, in the case of electronic nets, not from the multiplicity of mediation devices, but from their reduced physicality. The second feature cultural networks share with electronic networks, and which differentiates them from classical information networks, is the erratic and unpredictable proportion of the information transferred on the one hand to the effect of this information on the other. As in the case of the first commonality mentioned, the “reasons” behind this shared quality differ. With respect to IT, it is mainly based on a consequential feature of the reduced physicality of the mediating devices, namely, the possibility of a very high number of potential recipients gaining access to the information in question; in the case of the cultural net, it is, once again, not primarily the convenience of access, but rather the potential for rapid diffusion, based on the variety of mediating devices, which explains the astonishing disproportion between cause and effect (the quantity of information actually transferred and the quantity of acts of “extraction”).

These two features come close to invalidating the dichotomies of “center” and “periphery” and of “nodes” and “strings”, the critical components of all classical information systems. Or, to put this argument in the terminology used by the approaches criticized in this chapter: culturally relevant “contacts” may occur anywhere where one mediating device (typically a human mind) comes into contact with another. There are certainly privileged places where such contacts may occur more frequently; but as to the actual result, it seems to be of no importance whether a contact occurs in a “contact zone” or at a random place. As to the worldwide dissemination of Christianity’s holy book, it seems to have been Paul’s reconsideration of the “Gentile” tradition, which occurred at Ephesus, rather than his subsequent missions to Athens and Rome, the relevant contact zones of that age, which marks the decisive step. And as to the

leap seems to have been taken only in present times, when it suffices to change the computer directories, if one server is damaged, in order to reset the entire system.

dichotomy of periphery and center, it is not the differentiation as such which seems to be questionable; it is, rather, the assumed difference it entails with regard to the impact factor which evidences the extent to which both Casanova and standard leftist cultural theory fall prey, on behalf of their own premises, to what one may call “the hierarchical fallacy”. Places, concepts, and artistic forms at the top of the cultural hierarchy remain in this position for (very) short periods of human cultural history only. The constant and finally uncontrollable circulation of all cultural material in a limitless and decentered network is at the origin of a permanent shifting of “hierarchical” structures pertaining to culture in general, but even more so to de-pragmatized cultural products (artistic works)—which enjoy, on behalf of this characteristic, a control on the part of the “hierarchs” that is in many cases somewhat more benign than in the case of cultural products of a more serious, pragmatically relevant profile.

4.—I should like to illustrate my view by referring to an example given on various occasions in this book because it is so telling with regard to cultural exchange in its specificity. In order to “transfer” early modern French, English, and German culture to Russia,¹²⁰ there was no need to build an infrastructure for the transfer, to construct nodes, to rely on the specific capacities, in terms of activities of exchange, of contact zones, or to provide for points of access, let alone to have the transported material “consecrated” by an academy, etc. It sufficed to organize one (unhappy) imperial marriage, and the entire development began almost automatically. The female partner involved was a German princess from a small principality whose education was French and who became known in later times as Catherine the Great. The consequences of this single and random example of exchange were enormous.¹²¹ I leave it to the competency of specialists to assess the quality of Russian plays of the eighteenth century written in emulation of the “imported” plays in terms of aesthetic quality and sophistication. But no one will contest that the quality of the works written by the heirs of the tradition initiated by the event referred to above match the highest standards of world literature. And would it be sensible

120 I should stress that drama and theater as a specific item of culture had already been introduced to Russia some decades before (I will elaborate on that point in Part III). But the pervasive “Europeanization” of Russia commenced only in the above-characterized period.

121 Must I stress that they by far transcend the sphere of the fine arts? The all-encompassing Westernization of the country—basically, its reorganization according to the ideals of the French and German Enlightenment—also paved the way for leftist political theories to make their way into Russia. Assuming that Leninism and Stalinism would hardly have been able to emerge without the cultural process described above, a point I shall discuss in detail in a later chapter becomes evident: cultural exchange is by no means a “good” thing as such. As everything human, it is ambivalent. What counts is that it is a reality informing humans’ existence.

to say that the quality of the plays written in the nineteenth century metropolises, in Paris and London, is higher than that of those written by Chekhov?

Significant urban centers of cultural production do not last forever. They are even more ephemeral than their political counterparts. For a given city to become such a cultural center, it is requisite for a number of acclaimed works to be produced there during a specific time period. To take, for example, the case of Germany, it sufficed that two great minds settled in the only mentionable town of a tiny principality (i.e. Weimar) with negligible economic and military power, and then attuned themselves to the European cultural network of the period, while producing works that circulated in and were acclaimed by that network, for that principality to become a cultural center of world-literary prominence. Since cultural items, and specifically digitized and multipliable ones, such as books, are almost universally available, it is not economic and military power or population size that establishes a given area as a cultural center, but rather the productivity of those of its residents linked to the net.¹²²

5.—The purpose of my examples has been to demonstrate the sense in which Casanova’s theories are biased by the specific situation of the most centralized (nation-)state in human history—France.¹²³ But it should be noted that my argument likewise applies to the above-mentioned conceptions prominent in cultural studies. As unnecessary as it is to reside in a center in order to contribute to the cultural net, it is just as possible to do so if one does reside in a metropole as if one does not. Peripheral status does not inhibit, but it also does not favor successful contribution to the net. Works considered “great” in later times might have been assembled in Paris, Madrid, or London, in culturally “underdeveloped” places such as eighteenth-century Moscow, in marginal places such as

122 I should like to add that the same line of argument seems to apply to a non-artistic variant of cultural activity we typically call research or scholarship. In order to write an outstanding book, one need not reside in a metropole, not even in a scientific or scholarly metropole (which are in many cases, not least for the reasons mentioned above, *not* located in the “real” metropolises). Very many eminent scholars of world renown began their careers at small and rather unknown universities. Erich Auerbach wrote *Mimesis*, in my view the most important work of literary history published in the twentieth century, while living as a refugee in Istanbul. The connectivity to the cultural net he had at his disposal was almost exclusively based on what was stored in his own memory.

123 There was a (fortunately ephemeral) radicalization of the French model of centralization in twentieth-century totalitarian states, namely, the Soviet Union and Nazi Germany; during the period of the regimes in question, there were, indeed, no other places of relevant cultural production in the respective states than Moscow or Berlin. As may be gathered from the scenario of a totalitarianism in reluctant transition, namely that of mainland China, cultural production becomes cautiously decentralized at the very moment of a general relaxation of the system.

nineteenth-century Copenhagen or Oslo, in early modern provincial towns (in times when the province was truly “provincial”) such as Bordeaux, or in very small places—not much more than a market-place or a castle and some individual houses—such as Stratford-upon-Avon. The only thing needed to produce literary texts, even outstanding ones, is a mind capable of doing the job¹²⁴ and the possibility to connect to what I call the cultural net, which in the era I am talking about is typically based on the actual availability of a number of books, or on the fact that such books were read by the great mind in question in the past. In the age before script and print,¹²⁵ the connectivity might have been based on items such as a conversation with a traveler who had listened to a minstrel’s presentation in a nearby castle, or it may have been established by way of a

124 This formulation might appear at first sight to be a relapse into a Romantic theory of ingenuity; it is meant, however, as an abbreviation of what I shall expound in detail in the chapter on “Control and Demand”; it refers to someone who—for whatever reason—succeeds in assembling an artwork that meets the demands of its time.

125 This might be the appropriate moment to explain why I do not make use of the concepts of “archive” and of “accessing archives” in order to metaphorically convey how processes of cultural production may be conceptualized. In its literal acception, the term “archive” is bound to a relatively recent phase of the species’ history, whereas my concept of cultural production is meant to be characteristic of the species right from the beginning (as to details, see below, pp. 82 f.); one might, however, think of liberating the term from this implication by using it in a metaphorical way. But what can hardly be discarded, even if one suggests taking the term metaphorically, are the basic structural characteristics of archives, which are at odds with my conceptualization of cultural processes. It is not primarily the fact that an archive is a “real” (physically existent) rather than a virtual structure which prevents me from integrating the concept into my design; in very recent times, virtual archives have indeed emerged. It is rather the role of systematic ordering principles and of clear-cut intentionality that have led me to avoid the concept of archive. Cultural networks are only in very recent times based on the concrete intentions of those who establish them; in most cases, even in the present, they are by-products of the deployment of power techniques (conquest or dynastic alliances), of economic processes (trade and exchange), of migration triggered by external factors (climate change, overpopulation), or of cultural imperialism that is not based on concrete “archival” material, but rather on ideological convictions (general world-interpreting schemata, in former times mainly in the form of religions or philosophical schools, in more recent times in the form of normative anthropological and evolutionary conceptualizations such as “human rights” or “progress”). What may be even more important: in almost all cases, cultural networks are based on quite a few of these transfer structures; they are a fortuitous and erratic combination of various instrumentalizations of a parasitic kind. As such, they almost totally lack the primary characteristic of archives: systematic organization.—Need I make explicit that (actual) archives may play a role, at times an important one, in cultural production, specifically over the last 2,500 years? But if they do so, it is as *part* of the network structures I am trying to theorize here. Archives are one of many components of cultural networks, and, as said, not a necessary one.

ship-wrecked warrior who narrated his past endeavors to his loyal wife and adult son after having returned home at the end of a journey of no less than twenty years.¹²⁶—The question of whether or not artifacts first emerging in places considered peripheral to the world of their time benefit from a wider diffusion via the cultural net is certainly contingent to a certain extent upon the cultural activities of the politically and economically ruling elite.¹²⁷ Additionally, however, it depends on a factor that I will call “demand”, which is difficult to stimulate or direct, since it relies on a multiplicity of conditions which become systematically describable only in retrospect.¹²⁸

Processes and Rationales of Assembly

0.—Setting aside for the present a further and more detailed discussion of the conditions of access to the cultural net, I should like to engage in some hypothesizing concerning the question of how “working with the net” actually functions.

1.—Were I to describe the processes that lead to the emergence of a work of art in the metaphorical terms suggested in this book, this might result in formulations such as the following: Driven by a momentary inspiration gathered from a conversation, something read, or something viewed—that is, in my terminology, by connecting to the material floating in the virtual net of culture—the author or artist conceives a project for a work of his own. He then consciously but tentatively extracts a variety of content-related and formal material from the net, meaning: everything he has read or heard of that might be pertinent

126 —by which I do not wish to convey that the actual person behind the name “Homer” is in fact Penelope or Telemachus; but if we assume that the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* are based on an authentic substratum consisting of wars fought in territories far away from the small islands surrounding mainland Greece, it would not be unreasonable to consider a survivor, such as the one known by the name of Odysseus, to have been the agent of an enormous cultural transfer from the highly developed Asia Minor to the remote provinces of northwestern Greece.

127 This is the assumption that leftist cultural theory and Casanova’s more “conservative” approach have in common.

128 Neglect of this latter factor—that success in the past by no means guarantees success in the future—, or, to put it in different terms, the underestimation of the erratic course of cultural history, indicates that, notwithstanding the basic criterion described by me above as “Calvinist”, Casanova’s entire approach is informed not by nominalistic theology, but rather by the traditional (Catholic) approach of attempting to “match” God’s intentions by imitating the order of the universe created by Him. Theological nominalism would object that an omnipotent God is free to change His will, including the order of His creation, at any point in time, so that any project intended to secure lasting success by way of imitating what He has done in the past is illusory.

to his initial idea. Next, he starts provisionally assembling this diverse material with the goal of creating something that is at the same time “novel” and constitutes a compelling unity (a “work”) on the level of content as well as on the level of form. He reworks the assembled material again and again, while adding to the mix further components drawn from the items floating in the net, and possibly rejecting some of the material he withdrew previously; when he arrives at the impression that the result may be made public, he terminates his work.

2.—In order to explain this idea in greater detail, I shall propose to differentiate between three steps in the net-bound “creation” of a work of art. The first step is based on the state of being connected to the cultural net,¹²⁹ which results in the possibility of a “withdrawal” of circulating material. Since human minds are, from my perspective, components of the cultural net, the object of the withdrawal can be, apart from “external” material, items stored in the author’s own memory. This step may be subdivided into what is traditionally called the “inspiration”¹³⁰ (a “first idea”) and the subsequent more detailed conceptualization of the work to be created. The main feature differentiating the “artistic” variant of net-connectivity from the regular and quasi-permanent state of being connected to the cultural net is the conscious intention of extracting not random, but specific material with the aim of reassembling it, that is to say, the attitude of approaching the circulating material with a view to selecting and reusing it in order to produce “new” items.

In both cases (“inspiration”; conceptualization), the choices actually made seem to obey a logic of need or demand. In view of my entire approach, I have

129 It would necessitate detailed discussions to decide whether, as beings endowed with what we call consciousness or mind, there are any situations at all in which a specific person is *not* connected to the cultural net. As we were taught by Freud, even in moments of sleep we go on conceptualizing—meaning: drawing on previous material—though disassembling and then reassembling it in a fashion not allowed in the daytime. And even when we have the impression of simply letting the phenomena we perceive “directly” interact with our psyche (when contemplating a beautiful landscape, for instance), we are inevitably bound to certain pre-existing parameters of perception and association. It may be that, in situations of hard physical labor, namely in situations of modern, fragmented, industrial labor as theorized by Marx with the formula of *entfremdete Arbeit* (“alienated labor”), there is conscious human activity which could arguably be said to take place without being connected to the material floating in the cultural net. The repetitive labor routine would deactivate the “working” of the mind. But, for all other real-life situations thinkable, I would posit that humans are indeed consistently and permanently connected to the cultural net (even before they became hybrids of regular bodies and smartphones, as I allow myself to add in an ironic mode).

130 —not by the Muses, of course, but by something that is floating in the cultural net.

to insist on this point: the primary factor that “shapes” artistic works is demand; control—the active influencing of cultural items by external agents of political, religious, or economic power—is, indeed, a very important factor, but it is nevertheless a secondary one.

To give two examples from the period investigated: the “extraction”, on the part of famous Baroque operas,¹³¹ of mythical fables, e.g. the story of Orpheus and Eurydice, or of “historical” plots, e.g. the story of a love affair between Caesar and the Egyptian Queen Cleopatra, is primarily motivated by the creators’ desire to elevate the genre introduced by them, which arose from previous courtly multimedia performances, to an artistic dignity comparable to “serious” drama, and to endow it with the prestige of humanistic culture. The choice of Shakespeare’s *Hamlet* as a “source” for one of the first two dramas ever written in the Russian language,¹³² Sumarokov’s *Gamlet* (1748),¹³³ is primarily motivated by its author’s prestige, which Sumarokov exploits in order to promote himself in his role as a not-yet-established playwright; secondly, by the fact that relying on an English play was apt to impede the danger against which the “founding” of serious drama in the Russian language was meant to react, namely of French cultural hegemony; and, thirdly, by the fact that the wild plot of bloody dynastic struggle taking place in a Northern European kingdom resonated with the real-world experience of the intended audience, the Russian court society of a century that saw several tsars or tsarinas overthrown, imprisoned, or even violently put to death.

131 I am referring to Jacopo Peri’s and Ottavio Rinuccini’s *Orfeo e Euridice* (1600), commonly held to be the first (or, after their *Dafne*, which is no longer extant as a whole, the second) opera ever in the occidental tradition, and to Händel’s *Giulio Cesare in Egitto* (1723/4).

132 The term (early modern) “drama” is meant, here as elsewhere—if not specified otherwise—to refer to the genre (re-)emerging in the Renaissance. In Russia, as in many premodern societies, there were, before the times in consideration above, pantomimic street performances with a farcical profile. In addition, in the course of the seventeenth century, there were religious plays in the vein I call in this book “dramatized catechism” or “dramatized biblical history”, plays dealing, for example, with the biblical account of King Nebuchadnezzar, or of Artaxerxes, or with the New Testament Parable of the Prodigal Son. I do not comment on these plays, since it is evident that they perfectly conform to what I otherwise say about the material floating in the cultural net.

133 See in particular Kirill Ospovat, “The Catharsis of Prosecution: Royal Violence, Poetic Justice, and Public Emotion in the Russian *Hamlet* (1748)”, in: Katja Gvozdeva, Tatiana Korneeva, and Kirill Ospovat (eds.), *Dramatic Experience: The Poetics of Drama and the Early Modern Public Sphere(s)*, Leiden and Boston, MA 2017, pp. 189–219.

3.—The next step, and the one on which I would like to focus in the present chapter, I shall refer to as the stage of “assembly”,¹³⁴ meaning: of synthesizing the material available in order to produce a new work—as opposed to merely reproducing or receiving an existing work, which is the “standard” use made of the material floating in the cultural net and which, for reasons of the relative simplicity of the processes involved,¹³⁵ shall not be considered here in detail. The two examples just given are apt to illustrate a thesis that is crucial from the perspective of my approach: in the creation of new works, one is not dealing with “organic” processes—processes that constitute a prolongation, or an “unfolding”, of something that was already there—but with the putting together of elements which seem at times, considered individually, not to fit together at all. In the opera by Jacopo Peri and Ottavio Rinuccini alluded to above, the tragic outcome of the story as transmitted by Virgil and Ovid is replaced by a happy ending, that is, an element taken from available material usually labeled “comedy” or “fairy tale”; after Orpheus’ descent into Hades, the mythical couple returns to the world above and goes on living together in love and hap-

134 I have a preference for the term “assembly”, since it seems apt to stress what I am foregrounding here: the production of art as *techne*, not as based on an ecstatic state—*mania*—, and, consequently, not as an instance of truth (*aletheia*), but rather of didactics, entertainment, and reflection at the same time (the order of these functional dimensions is intentionally alphabetical; in terms of hierarchy, it is liable to change with periods, genres, and the audiences targeted).—One might think of further, somewhat “technical” metaphors in order to adequately conceptualize what I wish to convey (fusing; melding; smelting; alloying; blending; amalgamating). The main reason I suggest the term “assembly” is the fact that texts, quite like industrial products produced by assembly lines, allow the recipient who wishes to do so to identify the different components out of which they have been assembled. The more “chemical” metaphors enumerated above may suggest a homogeneity of the final product which affects the “substance” as such, whereas, according to my view, the homogeneity of an artwork is always, in the final analysis, a composite one.

135 The qualification of reception processes given above is, of course, a simplification. As is known from the discussions initiated by the theoretical paradigm of reader-response theory (*Rezeptionsästhetik*), every reception is an interpretation of its own, the “originality” of which might be no less great than in case of the creation of a “new” work. This problem is of particular importance for all genres that necessarily call for an interpretation *before* being committed to regular reception, as in the case of theater. This said, I should like to insist on the position that the creation of a novel work is something qualitatively different from the interpretation of a work already existing, albeit not as different as it was conceived within traditional (Romantic, pre-*Rezeptionsästhetik*) art theory. If every act of “authentic” creation is, indeed, no less based on pre-existing material floating in the cultural net than “mere” reception, the main difference would consist in that between the attitude of (only) wishing to understand what is already existing on the one hand, and the ambition to transform what already exists and to give the result of the transformation an explicit articulation on the other.

piness.¹³⁶ Something similar occurs in Sumarokov's *Gamlet*: the usurper is put to death; the disloyal mother and queen repents her past actions; the eponymous figure does not die in the final imbroglio; instead, with Ophelia at his side, he assumes his role as the legitimate heir to the throne.

As to the logic of such at first sight somewhat astonishing combinations of pre-existent material, the question of need and demand seems to call for further elaboration. In the case of the first opera ever written, the pragmatic configuration of its premiere was a royal wedding, namely, the courtly feast on the occasion of Maria de Medici's ascension to the rank of Queen of France. The context of Sumarokov's *Gamlet* was the end of the dynastic turmoil that had been shaking Russia for decades, with the accession of the "legal" heir, Elizabeth, to the throne.¹³⁷ In both cases, it is the festive context with a view to which the "new" works were assembled that likely accounts for the disassembly of the "tragic" endings and their substitution by a more joyful resolution of the plot. It should be added that in the case of cultured recipients, such erratic processes of assembling very heterogeneous elements—tragedy and fairy tale—permit the introduction of unarticulated subtexts which may be essential to the message as a whole. In the case of the royal wedding, the audience's consciousness of the original plot may have served as a reminder of the transiency of fortune and marital happiness.¹³⁸ The subtext works in the direction of a stabilization of

136 As to this opera, see also Déborah Blocker, "The Accademia degli Alterati and the Invention of a New Form of Dramatic Experience: Myth, Allegory, and Theory in Jacopo Peri's and Ottavio Rinuccini's *Euridice* (1600)", in: Gvozdeva et al. (eds.), *Dramatic Experience*, pp. 77–117.

137 Elizabeth was Peter the Great's daughter. The problem that caused the turmoil mentioned was Peter's own stipulation that succession should no longer be based on blood; the ruling tsar should rather be free to choose his own successor. Elizabeth was finally successful in reasserting the traditional genealogical succession.

138 A reworking of the Ovidian material which is both parallel in structure and partly analogous as to intent is the Christian allegorization of the story of Orpheus and Eurydice as documented from the twelfth-century *Ovide moralisé* onward. Eurydice, representing the human soul, is freed by her husband, Jesus Christ, from the bonds of death by his "song"—the divine *logos*. She is allowed to return to life with him, with the qualification that she does not look "back" upon hell. ("¿Qué importa que ellos la lleven, / si siempre que ella inconstante / pequé y tú el rostro la vuelvas / ha de volver a mí cárcel?"/ "What does it matter if they [Orpheus-Christ and his companions] lead her [Eurydice] out of hell, if she, inconstant as ever, relapses into sin and you make her turn her head backwards, so that she has to return to my prison?") The quote is from Calderón's "divinization" of the pagan myth, but the idea is not his own. It can be traced back to the above-mentioned medieval allegorizations of pagan myth (*El divino Orfeo* [the 1663 version], in: *Obras completas*, Ángel Valbuena Prat [ed.], Madrid 1952–1959, vol. 3, pp. 1835–1855; quote: p. 1854 b). The personage speaking is the Devil; the one whom

the context of power within which the opera's first representation took place. In a feudal society, political power is bound to the institution of marriage; legitimacy is based on birth. Even in moments of festive happiness, a monarch should never forget that human life might end abruptly. He should always keep in mind that, in order to guarantee the kingdom's stability, he has to provide for situations of reversals of fortune such as sudden, accidental death, since he and his spouse are living in a world where (earthly) resurrection may only occur in fictional plots.—The same might apply to Sumarokov's play: having the Shakespearean original in mind, the spectators would not have forgotten that a small portion of poison, administered at the right moment and at the right place, may completely overturn a configuration of serene stability and lead to situations of civil war and conquest by enemies.

4.—It should be emphasized that in the case of cultural artifacts, the metaphor of “assembly” differs from what is suggested by the proper meaning of the term for the simple reason that the (relative, historically varying, but always given) autonomy of artworks allows for the synthesis of items whose diversity by far transcends the dimension typically attained within regular processes of assembly, as in industrial production.¹³⁹ If the products of construction are in any case subject to the imperative that there must be people who are ready to “buy” them, the margins for what is acceptable are incommensurably higher for de-pragmatized than for pragmatic goods. This configuration implies that (artistic) cultures may be at the same time thoroughly intertwined, on behalf of their connection to the universal cultural net, and extremely diverse as to the actual cultural items produced.

he addresses (“tú”) and who is said to be able to make Eurydice act so as to be obliged to return to hell is, most probably, his companion, the allegory of “envidia”/envy, whose power is countered by the “nave de la Iglesia”, which the bride of Orpheus-Christ boards at the end of the trip. The oblique allusion to the original story serves as a reminder of the fact that a “sad” outcome continues to be a potentiality. For a detailed presentation of Calderón's text, including the previous reception history of the pagan myth at its basis, see my *Discursive Renovatio in Lope de Vega and Calderón*. Studies on Spanish Baroque Drama. With an Excursus on the Evolution of Discourse in the Middle Ages, the Renaissance, and Mannerism, Berlin and Boston, MA 2017, chap. 3.

139 —which is the sphere from which the term “assembly” originates. Industrial production is, however, nothing but a highly efficient stage of a cultural practice existing since the inception of the species' cultural activities: putting objects together which do *not* co-occur in the natural world (e.g. a wooden rod, a stone, and some sinew taken from an animal to fix the contraption) in order to create a new object which is meant to better fulfill certain desirable purposes.

I should like to illustrate this feature by reference to a striking example: as I shall stress on various occasions, we do not know exactly to what extent there was a circulation of cultural material between premodern Europe and premodern China; but given the fact that there have always been mediated trade relations, it is highly probable that certain similarities between early modern European drama and Chinese performing arts of the same age are based on transfer rather than polygenesis. The (late sixteenth- or early seventeenth-century) Chinese opera entitled in translation *The Peony Pavilion*, a work still performed today on stage,¹⁴⁰ displays a plethora of motifs which are very familiar to a reader of Calderón, in particular of *La vida es sueño* and, perhaps even more significantly, of *El mágico prodigioso*. While the difficulty or inability to distinguish between dream and reality might be less pertinent in this respect, since the idea is widespread, the motifs of “death”, “resurrection” (or reappearing as a ghost), and sexual encounters without the loss of virginity, all to be found in the Chinese play, are close to what is perhaps Calderón’s most extravagant *comedia*. This said, the resulting pieces are highly dissimilar. Calderón’s play is, as is always the case with this author, a Christian didactic drama, propagating the ethical imperative of *obrar bien* and demonstrating that God is ultimately “stronger” than the Devil and his many human agents. The Chinese opera, by contrast, is a highly sophisticated amusing play that likewise ends in a happy fashion, but without any didactic tenor linked to this ending.

The reason I should like to highlight this complicated mix of similarity and dissimilarity is the simple fact that the parallel motifs, which may owe their commonalities to processes of cultural transfer, are assembled against different philosophical and religious backgrounds. In the Christian tradition, life is considered to be finite and unique; once a person dies, her or his fate is sealed in eternity, and this fate is contingent upon the person’s actions during her or his lifetime.¹⁴¹ For this very reason, it is a matter of the highest relevance whether one is dreaming or awake, or whether the “persons” with whom one interacts are real human beings or nothing but “ghosts” produced by the powers of evil. “Real” deeds within a “real” setting do matter. Consequently, the distinction between reality and illusion is of primary importance for Western thinking in general, not only within the world of Calderón’s dramas. Within Buddhism,

140 For a more detailed discussion of the play, see Kilian, “*Escrituras andantes*”.

141 Up to this point, there is no difference between the Protestant and the Catholic world-models; the differences concern the question of the extent to which the individual is free to choose what she or he does; from a Protestant standpoint, a person who does not act in the “right” way is doomed to hell, even if she or he was not granted by God the grace of being capable of willingly opting for the “right” way.

Daoism, and Confucianism, by contrast, the concept of “beginning” and (definitive) “end” does not exist. Particularly within Buddhism, death is a step within a nearly endless chain of reincarnations. There is, of course, the threat of being reincarnated as a particularly base animal in the case of grave moral transgression, and the promise of nirvana in the case of morally exemplary behavior. But, as the prospect of gaining access to this state is linked to the prerequisite of a process of maturation mediated by a close to infinite number of metempsychoses, and as the close to endless character of this migration implies by necessity that one is incarnated quite a few times as a “base” being, the imperative of acting in “the right way” is much less strict than within Western culture. For that reason, the question of whether one is acting in a “real” situation or within an illusory framework is less important than within a cultural framework without the concept of metempsychosis. Within Chinese dramatic art, everything is playful comedy, while in the West this merely constitutes one variant—considered of minor value—of a dramatic system whose pillars are tragedy and serious didactic drama.

5.—The last step within the process of artistic creation which I would like to posit is a decisive one if the bits and pieces combined have the ambition to be more than a satire in the etymological sense,¹⁴² that is, to become accepted as a serious work of art: there must be a level on which the disparate material is homogenized in a convincing way, so as to establish what we call the “unity” of the work in question. So far, I have only mentioned the use of a specific linguistic code as a device for implementing homogeneity.

Language, in the sense of the vernacular in which a text is written, is, indeed, the standard device for homogenizing the diverse parts assembled. Arbitrary symbolic codes have a striking capacity—which may be linked to their arbitrary character—to produce within their recipients the impression of “unity” of a material which is, phenomenally and in terms of provenance, extremely composite; the importance of this homogenizing device must certainly not be underestimated, all the more as it has produced highly influential theories of culture claiming an “essential” relationship between specific vernaculars and specific artistic works. Before engaging in a more detailed discussion of such theories,¹⁴³ I should like to restrict myself, for the time being, to some short critical remarks in this respect: In the field of human creation, and in contrast to the natural world, there is no rule without exceptions; they are rare, but

142 The word is said to derive from Latin *satura*, meaning: a platter with a huge variety of different things to eat.

143 See, above all, my discussion of Herder’s cultural theory, pp. 232–250.

instructive. In the age I am dealing with, there are so-called “macaronic” texts, that is, texts containing passages in Latin as well as passages in vernacular languages. In later times there are decidedly multilingual texts such as Diderot’s *Les bijoux indiscrets* (1748). Prominent texts from the period of high modernism, such as T. S. Eliot’s *The Waste Land* (1922), even make systematic use of the device.

These exceptions to the rule of language as the most explicit device for bestowing the impression of unity on the assembled material, resulting in what we are used to calling a “text” or a literary “work”, show that the decisive level of homogenizing is rather the one of conceptual unity. If a text succeeds in communicating the basic concept by which it is informed to the intended recipients, the elements it is made up of may be as diverse as one can imagine—the text will be accepted as a work of art. Macaronism was not an irritating feature at a time when the educated switched from Latin to a vernacular, and from one vernacular to another, as part of their daily routine. Diderot’s multilingualism is a sort of playful esotericism; by occasionally employing languages allegedly not understood by the majority of the recipients, it was possible to give explicit expression to obscenities which it would not have been permissible to articulate in French at that time. Eliot’s text belongs to an important strand of high modernist art in general—including literary texts, but also paintings and music—which is perhaps best characterized by a term typically applied to works of visual art: conceptual art. The unity of such works does not primarily reside in their internal structuring. It is to be found in a concept that is in most cases external to the work in question, but known to, or, at least, accessible to those familiar with the history and evolutionary logic of (Western) art. Eliot’s text, while referring to typically Romantic elements, is a rejection of Romantic aesthetics, and it attacks the Romantic ideal, amongst others, on its most basic level, by undermining in an ostentatious way the link between the artistic text and the specific language in which it is written, a link that is essential to the idea of a literary text as a “spontaneous” expression of an “inspiration”. Artificiality laid bare is the rationale behind Eliot’s multilingualism. It may be added that such an “externalization” and “conceptualization” of the principle of homogeneity makes a work of art esoteric; this is the dilemma of high modernism. The ensuing restriction of the recipients to relatively small circles of connoisseurs was the main reason for the emergence of postmodernism, which is at least partly a return to more “concrete” devices of homogenizing diverse material.

6.—In the case of (literary) texts, the most elementary of the devices for establishing unity—secondary to homogenizing on the linguistic level—consists in what Aristotle calls in his *Poetics* the creation of a story (*mythos*), saying that

a story needs to have “a beginning, a middle, and an end”;¹⁴⁴ lyrics—not discussed by Aristotle—, if they do not narrate a story as well,¹⁴⁵ but rather present a thought, an “atmosphere”, or a feeling, likewise follow a content-bound internal logic in their actual structuring. As banal as this description seems to appear at first sight, it is in fact crucial. In the case of texts prior to high modernism, readers expect a certain logic to be followed by the events we are told to have taken place, or, in the case of lyrical texts, by the feelings ascribed to the speaker. The order we expect from literary texts is certainly more flexible than the one we suppose to regulate the “real” material world as conceptualized by the laws of physics, but the impression of erratic contingency—as in certain dramatic texts of the twentieth century, the most radical case perhaps being Federico García Lorca’s *Don Perlimplín* (1933)—would undermine, if not destroy, the acceptability of a text.¹⁴⁶ The logic readers expect is in very many cases grounded in an idea (one could say: an ideologeme) that is commonly accepted at a given time in a given place, which means that recipients typically do not assess the plausibility of the action presented according to “mimesis” strictly understood, but most frequently by referring to a level of abstraction, that is, by allegorizing what they read or see. I would speculate that the fusion of tragedy and fairy tale in Peri/Rinuccini attained (and still attains) the level of acceptability on the grounds of the somewhat lofty idea of the “power of love”, which becomes associated in Christian times with the concept of love’s ability to defeat death, a concept transposed to the field of secular love (*eros*) as early as in the Middle Ages. And Sumarokov’s at first sight somewhat strange rewriting of *Hamlet* as a fairy tale gains unity only on the grounds of the idea that there is something like a divine investiture of kings and emperors and a transcendental guarantee of the concept of legitimacy as based on inheritance.—We call the age of artistic creation during which it was the authors’ or painters’ (or even composers’¹⁴⁷) ambition to base the internal unity of their works no longer on ideologemes, but on an immanent causal concatenation of

144 *Poetics*, chap. 7.

145 The dominant tradition of lyrical poetry in Western vernaculars is based on the paradigm first established by Petrarch’s *Canzoniere* (ca. 1370). Not only the collection as a whole, but almost all of the poems have a narrative substrate.

146 As to the uncontested unity of Lorca’s text, it is to be found—as in the case of *The Waste Land*—not on the primary level of text-immanent structure, but rather on a conceptual meta-level which is external to the actual text. In this respect, Lorca’s text is even more representative of high modernist art than Eliot’s, since it does not target the poetic principles of one specific epoch, but rather—according to the concept of art as unrestricted “revolution”—the principles of order and coherence which are basic to the Western conception of what art is, starting with chap. 9 of Aristotle’s *Poetics*.

147 I am here thinking of nineteenth-century program music.

the elements themselves, the age of “realism”, whose basic device is, as stated by Roman Jakobson, *motivirovka*, the consistent motivation of all the events recounted in the text.¹⁴⁸

7.—The homogenizing devices mentioned so far¹⁴⁹ are related to what we typically call semantics, to signs referring to (specific) meanings.¹⁵⁰ Is there also the possibility to confer unity upon a diverse ensemble of assembled elements by making use of non-semantic, formal structures, or even: only such formal structures? The question is in particular need of discussion with regard to textual genres that are linked to a high and visible degree of formal organization, namely poetry. Since I do not wish to deal here with literary texts in the most general way, I shall leave this question open; suffice it to say that in the case of traditional drama also, there is such a device, and a highly important one, of formally homogenizing the textual material, namely versification. But I would call into question the capacity even of very strict patterns such as the French alexandrine to bestow unity upon a fund of material that has not undergone previous processes of semantically relevant homogenizing, and I would doubt this possibility with regard to poetry proper as well.¹⁵¹

I shall limit the discussion of this point to a subgenre of drama or theater otherwise neglected in this book, but which has just been thematized, namely opera, where the level of external formal organization is a particularly obvious one, since it can be completely detached from the text as such and even en-

148 “O chudožestvennom realizme” (1921), English version in: Roman Jakobson, *Language in Literature*, Krystyna Pomorska and Stephen Rudy (eds.), Cambridge, MA and London 1987, pp. 19–27, quote: p. 27.

149 Meaning: the secondary homogenizing devices, the first one being the linguistic homogenization.

150 From my not mentioning explicitly the question of assembling a “homogeneous” central personage, readers may infer that I am basically an Aristotelian (in general, but also with regard to this specific point, namely, the assumption of the primacy of plot/*mythos*).

151 In the cultural sphere, in contrast to the natural sphere, there is no rule without an exception. In addition, artistic cultural items are defined by being liberated from a number of constraints to which all pragmatic cultural items have to bow in the final analysis. This “freedom” has been taken advantage of in the period we typically call modernism. As to poetry in particular, there are experiments trying to base the unity of poems no longer on semantic, but only on euphonic consistency (Mallarmé). But as is demonstrated by the genre’s further history, this was, finally, a dead end; and one could legitimately raise the question of the extent to which Mallarmé’s texts can reasonably be assigned the label of poetry or whether it is more sensible to classify them as (vocal) music. They are, in any case, a phenomenon of transgression; they intentionally blur pre-existing categorial divides and are thus representative of the concept of “art as revolution” that first emerged in Romanticism.

joyed without it, which is not the case with respect to the “musical” dimension of poetry. Is the music and its coherence, that is, its organization according to certain patterns familiar to the audience, a means of conferring unity upon a disparate fund of personages, events, and actions which are not homogenized on the level of text, that is, in terms of semantics? One could very well imagine that compositional techniques current in Baroque music, which call for a grandiose, triumphant *finale*, may have repressed, in the case of Peri’s opera, concerns with regard to the plausibility of the narrated story which might come up when reading Rinuccini’s *libretto* alone. Thinking of posterior stages of operatic production, I would speculate that many scenes from Verdi’s or Wagner’s operas would appear incoherent, strange, or even ridiculous if we only had access to the *libretti*. And in the case of a highly sophisticated work like Benjamin Britten’s *Curlew River* (1964), which is a wild mix of Noh-inspired elements, Christian liturgical drama, and a more or less veiled layer of homoeroticism,¹⁵² I would doubt that it could have gained convincing unity without the homogenizing power of the text-external formal element, the music. But in the end, I am inclined to say that no artistic work (even not the most avant-garde) consisting, amongst other levels, of language, can completely do without a certain homogeneity located on the level of the text. The margins for admitting textual disparity, however, are (much) greater in genres that have recourse to visual or auditive channels of non-textual formal organization than in works consisting of text alone.

When it comes to discussing my specific field of investigation, early modern drama, there are, indeed, also textual devices independent from semantics which are apt to palliate a certain amount of semantic disparity. The presence of a system of instructions for formulating texts, classical rhetoric, provides a sort of second-level language facilitating the homogenization of the assembled material;¹⁵³ in addition, the nearly omnipresent device of versification allows the process of semantic homogenization to be kept at a level which is below what we typically require from texts written in prose. But the difference seems not to be a drastic one.

152 See Carrie J. Preston, “Trouble with Titles and Directors: Benjamin Britten and William Plomer’s *Curlew River* and Samuel Beckett’s *Footfalls/Pas*”, in: C. J. P., *Learning to Kneel: Noh, Modernism, and Journeys in Teaching*, New York, NY 2016, pp. 203–242.

153 See the proceedings of the DramaNet conference *Rhetoric and Drama* (ed. D. S. Mayfield, Berlin and Boston, MA 2017); see in particular the article by Jan Bloemendal which addresses the entire question from a concrete, but also a theoretical vantage point (“Rhetoric and Early Modern Latin Drama: The Two Tragedies by the “Polish Pindar” Simon Simonides [1558–1629]: *Castus Ioseph* and *Pentesilea*”, pp. 115–134).

8.—Things may differ to a more considerable degree when one proceeds to take into account a feature that is specific to the text corpus under scrutiny in the present study, namely, the fact that the texts were written with the intention of having them received as performance. If the recipient does not read and study the text, but rather receives the drama in question by attending a performance, the external formal structure of the performance (the theater as *lieu autre* [Michel Foucault], that is, the separation of stage and audience), as well as the specific formal structure of the actual performance which she or he attends—the costumes of the actors, their specific body language, the coherence of the entire visual level as conceived by the stage director of that specific performance—might create an impression of sufficient homogeneity in cases where a reader would be left startled by the numerous discrepancies he is confronted with. The most popular drama in world literature might be an instructive example of the specific requirements regarding homogenization for theater on the one hand, drama as text on the other. Shakespeare's *Hamlet* has fascinated and goes on fascinating diverse audiences from various cultural backgrounds when performed on stage; however, readers of the play—professionals, academics as well as authors—frequently articulate the impression that the drama is somewhat strange or obscure, not really worked through;¹⁵⁴ given the success of Shakespeare's creation, such a critique is audacious. In other words: it would probably be even sharper if it did not target one of the best-known dramas of all of literary history so far.

9.—The general processes described above are preceded in the act of creation, in almost all cases, by a step which is of primary importance with regard to cultural production. This step might be called the decomposition of pre-existent cultural material and its subsequent refunctionalization. It is, indeed, one of the peculiar features of shaped material we tend to call “cultural”, in contrast to “material” material in the sense of manufactured goods,¹⁵⁵ that it may either be extracted from the net and then used as it is or partially extracted and made a component of “new” cultural units whose functions may differ from the work it was initially part of. This fundamental difference even applies to the sphere of art itself, where it differentiates artifacts constituted by “dense” signs from those based on “notational” signs (Goodman). In the case of the former, there is hardly the possibility to make productive use of them once they have been disassembled. If one cuts a painting into pieces, it is de-

¹⁵⁴ See, for example, T. S. Eliot, “Hamlet and His Problems”, in: T. S. E., *The Sacred Wood: Essays on Poetry and Criticism*, London 1921, pp. 47–50.

¹⁵⁵ —which may comprise cultural items as well; one may think of paintings.

stroyed, and the only ambition of those who have the pieces at their disposal would be to reconstitute the former unit;¹⁵⁶ the same holds true for most kinds of manufactured, “practical” goods. As for texts (as well, to a certain extent, as musical works¹⁵⁷), matters are different, and this difference: the possible productivity of “fragments”, even small fragments, of what was formerly a coherent unit, may weigh a lot when it comes to discussing the reasons why cultural evolution follows a much more flexible scheme than, say, industrial evolution¹⁵⁸ (and why literary history is different from art history). Succinctly put, cultural products that make use of notational encoding or that have been transposed into notational encoding¹⁵⁹ float in the net in two different registers: as finite works, that is, entities intentionally conceived by their creator (or creators, if the creation process is collective), but also as a multitude of identifiable units, concrete or abstract, into which they might be decomposed on behalf of their notational encoding. The process of decomposing may take place as a conscious one (in the case of a commentator—a humanist, a critic—who “analyzes” a work, or a number of works, or a genre, and then commits

156 In order to avoid misunderstandings, I stress, once again, that most of the generalizing claims in this book do not pretend to systematically apply to high modernist art, unless otherwise said. High modernism is a period based on the attempt to radically problematize all principles governing previous art production. From this perspective, it is an era in which art focuses on the reflection of its own (traditional) principles. In the case above, the technique of *collage* would be a device which problematizes—or was even designed in order to problematize—the general assumption given expression to by my formulations. But at least to my knowledge, the cultural revolutions in the West gained their acceptance by always keeping their practices within the limits of—an at times provocative—playfulness. Cutting paintings by Michelangelo, Dürer, and Rembrandt into pieces in order to reassemble them by way of a *collage* was never undertaken or suggested, not even in the most radical modernist manifestos.

157 —keeping in mind the differentiations detailed above (n. 101).

158 One could object with respect to industrial production that there is the practice called “recycling”; but, as a systematically implemented practice, it is a very recent one. It is, more or less, linked to the technology of so-called module-based production, which was introduced only in the course of the last three decades. In addition, it remains to be discussed if there aren’t profound differences between industrial and cultural “recycling” with respect to re-functionalization. In industrial processes, the “original” function of the module gained from the disassembly of an object is typically preserved when the module in question is being assigned to use in a newly assembled object. Authentic re-functionalization is bound to the breaking-down of the module into its elements (steel, aluminum, plastics, etc.), that is to say, to the destruction of the initial structure. Within culture, specifically within literary culture, things seem to be different. Re-functionalization may operate both ways: by bestowing an entirely new function on a pre-existing, highly organized structure, or by decomposing this highly organized structure and making use of its elements or of some of them only.

159 Meaning: comments on or analyses of works of graphic art.

the results of his “dissection” to the cultural net); it may take place as a more or less unconscious process of amateur abstraction or compression (in the case of a recipient who tells a friend or a business partner about some features of a book he read or a performance he watched); or it may take place as an intentional act on the part of a posterior artist who makes use of selected semantic and formal features of a specific work originating from the activities of a previous creative mind.

10.—I would like to illustrate this peculiarity by providing a prominent example from early modern poetological discussions revolving around the concept of tragedy. We commonly subsume these discussions under the heading of “neo-Aristotelianism”. Much ink has been spilt over the last decades in order to demonstrate that (Italian, Spanish, French) neo-Aristotelianism is a gross distortion of Aristotle’s concept of tragedy as exposed in the *Poetics*. Such attempts to “prove” that the European early modern age “misread” Aristotle follow a logic based on the dynamics of scholarly discourses rather than that of a reasonable attitude towards the actual problem. It is trivial to say that the reception of a text two and a half millenia after its composition is not loyal to the original.¹⁶⁰ But these somewhat questionable controversies and discussions do not matter here. I should just like to propose that seventeenth-century neo-Aristotelianism follows in its basic arguments Aristotle’s central positions: the function of tragedy is the arousal of affects, mainly “fear” and “pity”, with the intention of purifying these affects or of relieving the spectators of them.¹⁶¹ In order to provoke these emotions in the spectators, Aristotle argues, the plot of the play must be such that it can be regarded as possible; it has to respect the limits of what is called verisimilitude. If the action is chiefly or even entirely fantasmatic, the spectators do not consider the situations performed to be possible configurations¹⁶² of their own lives and consequently are not seized by fear (*phobos*). The claim regarding the *mythos* is supplemented by a claim

160 I shall set aside the question of the grounds on which twentieth- and twenty-first-century mainstream classicists believe to be able to say what Aristotle’s original intentions were, or, rather, to assume that they are better suited to resolve this question than the theoreticians of the seventeenth century.

161 This latter point is, as is well known, not at all clear in Aristotle’s text either.

162 It is the structural analogy, which I try to highlight by choosing this term, that counts; of course, a situation in which one kills a person who later turns out to be one’s own father and marries one’s mother without being conscious of the previous biological relationship is beyond any similarity to the recipients’ lifeworld; but it may occur to humans that in emotionally charged situations they perform actions they believe to be ethically justified or at least tenable and which later turn out to have been actions they would never have performed had they known what they were “really” doing.

concerning the central character: he or she must be *homoion* (equal in the sense of similar)¹⁶³ to what the spectators conceive as real.

At the beginning of the seventeenth century, this structure, which inextricably links mimesis and emotionalization, is decomposed into two units which then become, each separately, the poetological bases of the further two prominent subgenres of narrative in the West.¹⁶⁴ As far as we are able to reconstruct, it was Jean-Baptiste Du Bos who—for whatever reason¹⁶⁵—was the first to actually put into practice this decomposition of the original Aristotelian unit.¹⁶⁶ In his *Réflexions critiques sur la poésie et sur la peinture* (1719), he privileges the aspect of emotionalization (“les poemes et les tableaux ne sont de bons ouvrages qu’à proportion qu’ils nous émeuvent et qu’ils nous attachent.”).¹⁶⁷ The decisive step I here call “decomposing” occurs a few lines later, where Du Bos proceeds not only to qualify the mimetic dimension as negligible, but to advise the construction of a plot against the rules of verisimilitude if it thereby gains in emotionalizing potential (“un ouvrage peut etre mauvais sans qu’il y ait des fautes contre les règles, comme un ouvrage plein de fautes contre les règles peut etre un ouvrage excellent.”).¹⁶⁸

163 In Aristotle, this similarity seems to be primarily meant in terms of psychic mechanisms, that is, in terms of patterns of situations and reactions; on a secondary level, it is thus linked to social similarity (only an “honorable” man, that is, a full citizen—meaning: an aristocrat—behaves in the way Oedipus does when he is provoked by Laios; if a metic or a slave behaved this way, it would be beyond verisimilitude, at least from the perspective of fifth-century Athenian spectators). In the early modern age, these criteria establishing the similarity of the character with respect to the spectators are inverted in a way; similarity is conceived primarily in terms of social stratification, interactional mechanisms being conceived of as immediately linked to social class (*honnête homme*). The reasons for this shift may be found in the more rigid regulation of interactional patterns in courtly societies as compared to the aristocratic (“democratic”) Athenian society of classical times.

164 By “narrative” I refer to all literary genres that are based on a story, namely the novel and the drama, as well as to related genres of various profile (short stories, films, performances, etc.).—I shall address the possible origins of the third modern subgenre of narrative, the self-reflexive mode, in a chapter below (pp. 298–303).

165 I will offer some speculation on this point below (p. 70).

166 For details, see Tatiana Korneeva, “Entertainment for Melancholics: The Public and the Public Stage in Carlo Gozzi’s *L’amore delle tre melarance*”, in: Gvozdeva et al. (eds.), *Dramatic Experience*, pp. 140–171. See also Logan J. Connors, “Pierre Nicole, Jean-Baptiste Dubos, and the Psychological Experience of Theatrical Performance in Early Modern France”, in: *Dramatic Experience*, pp. 172–188.

167 *Réflexions critiques*, Paris 1770 (17th print), reprint Geneva 1967, vol. 2, pp. 339 f.

168 Pp. 339 f. The “règles” in the quote refer primarily to the famous “trois unités” (of place, time, and action), which served as formal guidelines in order to guarantee the verisimilitude of the action as a whole.—Du Bos’s argument is still linked, in a certain way, to Aristotle’s text. The Stagirite allows breaches of the rule of verisimilitude in case the overall effect is thus

It is not astonishing at all that shortly after Du Bos's provocative decomposition of the unity of mimesis and emotion, there emerge concepts which give privilege to the other part of the former unit. The theory of the *drame bourgeois*, mainly developed by Diderot, continues to dedicate some attention to the aim of emotionalizing spectators; but Diderot argues that in order to achieve this aim, playwrights must first of all convert to a radical mimeticism. It is no longer a broadly understood concept of verisimilitude, but the analogy of dramatic scenes to the daily experience and specific feelings of the audience—middle-class Parisians belonging to the Third Estate—which guarantees the spectators' identification with what they see on stage. According to Diderot, it is only such an identification which is apt to provoke emotional involvement.

Diderot's theory of the *drame bourgeois* forms, as has been frequently argued, the basis for the broad strand of literary realism which becomes dominant in the nineteenth century.¹⁶⁹ The privileging of mimesis over emotionalization marks the end of "heroes", knights, princesses, gods, and mythical beings as personages of literary texts. The drama as well as the novel convert to the ideal of the reproduction of what the audience is ready to accept as "their" world (and not, as was formerly the case, a "possible world"). Emotionalization, which is still present in Diderot, even on the theoretical level, becomes more and more a recessive phenomenon; the criterion of the well-conceived narrative work is its mimetic capacity. Are readers seized by fear and pity as they read *Madame Bovary* (1857)?

Spectators do weep, however, as one may see in any present-day movie theater, when they expose themselves to those variants of fictional narrative which follow the precepts first theorized by Du Bos. With a slightly condescending attitude, we usually call these artifacts "trivial". Fictions like *Titanic* (1997) do not thematize what is completely out of reach of the real, but they deal with configurations whose exceptional status is evident. Dying from an accident while traveling is a rare, but possible incident to be taken into account when making a journey; dying in such an accident while simultaneously experiencing a bittersweet love story is certainly beyond the limits of verisimilitude. Such a story seems, however, to appeal to deeply rooted emotional needs that our actual daily lives do not satisfy.

better achieved; but he emphasizes that such devices must remain an exception (*Poetics*, chap. 18, 1456 a 25; 25, 1461 b 15). Du Bos claims general relevance for what was exceptional in Aristotle and thus subverts Aristotle's most basic definition of drama as *mimesis*.

¹⁶⁹ Regarding this point (including the extensive research done in the second half of the twentieth century), see my *Ästhetik der Wirklichkeitsdarstellung und Evolution des Romans von der französischen Spätaufklärung bis zu Robbe-Grillet*, Stuttgart 1987.

As a result of this process, the decomposition of Aristotle's theory of the tragic, there are no longer tragedies in modern Western literature. On the one hand, there is the literary staging of somewhat banal mishaps and disappointments of everyday life, which are all too common to provoke deep emotions, even if the ending is the premature death of the central personage. On the other hand, there are highly charged stories which satisfy the recipients' affective needs, but which they would never take for real in the sense that they might become involved in similar situations. From the above-specified moment in literary history onward, narratives are split into two functionally very different categories: *representations* we mainly read or view in order to reflect upon what (our) reality is like, and *compensations* we read or view in order to obtain, at least fantasmatically, what we most probably will never obtain in reality.

The question of the reasons for Du Bos's decomposition of the link firmly established in the Aristotelian theory of tragedy is a very intriguing one, although it is of much less relevance than the question of the actual effects generated by this decomposition. Du Bos was not only a theoretician of literature, but also a theologian; he was specifically influenced by the basically pessimistic variant of Christian anthropology to be found in Pascal. In the final account, it is the mighty strand of Pauline and Augustinian theology floating in the net upon which he drew, while completely overturning its original anti-theatrical implications. If humans have a hardly controllable propensity to commit sinful acts, the situation of idleness (in the terms of moral theology: *acedia*¹⁷⁰) is a particularly dangerous one. When the mind is not preoccupied with a specific goal it is pursuing, it will almost inevitably fall prey to the temptations of sin. For this reason, it might be a highly useful preventive to engage the mind in activities for which it has a predilection, namely: emotional arousal, but to do so in a way that does not have any real-life consequences. Thus, involving humans in fantasizing by exposing them to emotionalizing performances is the best way to prevent them from actually sinning.¹⁷¹ The extent to which the situations represented on stage entertain at least some analogy with what the recipients would be ready to classify as "real" is of minor relevance within such a functionalization.

11.—It is a theoretically stimulating problem of another logical order, relevant to the context of disassembly and refunctionalization, to scrutinize the movement, or rather the conscious transposition, of cultural material extracted from

¹⁷⁰ I shall give a more detailed comment on this sin below (pp. 84–87).

¹⁷¹ For an extensive account of Du Bos's argumentative steps, see Korneeva, "Entertainment for Melancholics".

the net from one “level” of cultural production to another, including the consequences this entails. Katja Gvozdeva’s study¹⁷² elucidates a process which not only occurred in the period under consideration, but may have taken place, *mutatis mutandis*, quite a few times under different circumstances. The theater pieces written and performed by companies of “merrymen” like the *Accademia degli Intronati* were based on models from classical antiquity (Plautus, Terence); in this regard, the theatrical work of the *Intronati* is typical of what academies and learned societies in Italy did at that time. They actively worked to revitalize the cultural patrimony from the pre-Christian age. At the time of their original production, classical comedies were popular pieces conceived for reception by a socially non-stratified audience including the uneducated,¹⁷³ as is evidenced by a variety of quite condescending remarks to be found in Aristotle’s *Poetics*.¹⁷⁴ But when the pieces were “reborn” in early modern Europe, the course of time and the new context had rendered them specimens of high-brow, elitist culture. Common people were not able to directly understand the text of a performance, because social practices, codes of conduct, and allusions to political life which were accessible to everyone in the Roman audience of Plautus’ times had turned into hermetic features by the time the “Renaissance” took place. In order to grasp what the pieces wished to convey, a spectator had to be a very cultured, learned person. The work done by the *Intronati*, their rewriting of classical comedies, consisted mainly in the attempt at re-popularizing a genre which, though popular in its origins, had become elitist. The process consisted in hybridizing the classical models with features of contemporary oral popular drama. By so doing, for example by rewriting the *Menaechmi* (ca. 200 BCE) as the *Ingannati* (1532 CE),¹⁷⁵ the *Intronati* succeeded in creating an entirely new variant of comic theater, a mixture of refined or learned and of vulgar if not obscene traits—a variant which then became the embryo of what we are accustomed to regard as the apogee of early modern comedy, the comedic works of Shakespeare and Molière.¹⁷⁶

172 *Compagnie d’hommes joyeux*.

173 In the Athens of classical times, citizenship was linked to extraction, but the elite constituted by this criterion was not at all homogeneous in terms of levels of education and cultivation; the latter also applies to the status of *civis romanus* (not only after, but also before its emancipation from the criterion of extraction), which guaranteed access to the performances in the arenas and amphitheaters.

174 *Poetics*, chap. 5.

175 As to this play in particular, see Katja Gvozdeva, “Why Do Men Go Blind in the Theatre? Gender Riddles and Fools’ Play in the Italian Renaissance Comedy *Gl’Ingannati* (1532)”, in: Gvozdeva et al. (eds.), *Dramatic Experience*, pp. 35–76.

176 The implication of my above characterization is that I see classical Greek (“old”) comedy as mainly dedicated to vulgar and obscene registers.

12.—The question of the modern reception of the classical genre of tragedy allows for the consideration of a particularly intricate point involved in a theory of cultural dynamics based on the assumption that creation functions by means of extraction of material floating in a universal cultural net—a point that is veiled, in the case of the comic genre(s), by the comparatively high standardization of its elements. It is a commonplace to hold that early modern European tragedies were much more influenced by Seneca’s plays than by the Greek plays European culture from the late eighteenth century through today has valued as the apogee of the “tragic”. Seneca’s plays, however, are based on these Greek plays; the existence of many of the Greek originals is known to us only because these served as the bases of still extant plays written in Latin. With respect to early modern European plays, the crucial question would thus be whether we should consider them to be products of an extraction of Senecan tragedy from the net, or whether what is extracted is only superficially Senecan, but in essence Sophoclean, Euripidean, or Aeschylean. Just posing the question makes clear, however, that we are at risk of falling prey to a *regressus ad infinitum*. It is well known, and clearly expressed already by Aristotle, that very many of the plots of the famous Greek tragedies were not created by the respective authors of these tragedies. Myth, however, is a cultural repertoire which is characterized not least by basic plot instability, which raises the question of identifiability. If one considers mythical stories to be the “real” originals underlying the supposed originals currently connected with the names of the three famous Greek tragedians, one is rapidly approaching a level of generality or of anthropological commonality which makes it difficult to decide whether or not a concrete story should be considered the result of cultural contact and exchange or whether it is in its origins autochthonous in the literal sense of the term.

Keeping these elementary difficulties in mind, it may be useful to differentiate between direct and mediated transfer if the specific questions at issue are of a more historical profile, that is, if they pertain to the description of concrete processes of net-bound production. Early modern European tragedy first emerged in Italy, but the relevant works never made it to the level of world literature. On behalf of dynastic and territorial configurations, sixteenth-century Italy maintained close relations with France and Spain, as well as with those German-language territories which were part of the Habsburg empire. The exchange of people from all social classes, in the one direction as well as in the other, the exchange of material goods, and the exchange of cultural practices and artifacts was intense. The affinities between the vernaculars concerned, particularly in the case of Spain, facilitated these processes. As part of this scenario, groups of Italian actors travelled to Spain and France and per-

formed their pieces in these countries. Young literary authors from Spain, Portugal, and France frequently traveled to Italy, not only as soldiers, or to visit the remains of the Roman Empire, or to worship the Christian God in Rome, where his vicar resides, but also to find inspiration for their work. The commonalities originating from this “migration” of sixteenth-century Italian theatrical and dramatic culture to the west and to the north notwithstanding, the results were very different. Lope de Vega and Corneille, Calderón and Racine have many things in common; the neo-Aristotelian treatises on drama in both countries evidently share a great many “norms” and “rules”; but it is not least the properly modern reception history of the twentieth century which testifies to the fact that the two Italy-based dramatic cultures are very dissimilar. Racine and even Corneille are still represented on stage and attract a considerable audience, whereas it would be difficult to find a staging of pieces by Calderón or Lope, even of their most famous works.

It may be the late eighteenth-century Russian drama that is apt to demonstrate that the importance of an exact description of the processes of mediation may, however, finally be a quite relative one. The commonalities between Russian eighteenth-century drama and early modern Italian drama are rather small, but they are not smaller than the commonalities between Italian drama and French drama of the early modern age. However, in the former case, there is one more step of mediation involved than in the latter. To put it abstractly: mediated “import” (as in the case of Russia with respect to Italian drama) should in principle be differentiated from direct import (as in the case of France and Spain with respect to Italian drama); but, finally, it seems not to be the degree of “mediatedness” which determines the degree to which an artifact based on material extracted from the net is considered by recipients to be imitative or “original”. One could even venture the hypothesis that multilayered mediation is in this case—against what intuition would suggest—a positive factor, since in the domain of culture the distortive effects typically brought about by several subsequent acts of mediated transmission are not necessarily “damaging”, but may rather have a “creative” function; for artistic units, in contrast to both the pragmatic and the ideological sphere, there is no preestablished ideal type. Without the mediation of French court theater, early modern Italian-style, that is Renaissance tragedy would most probably have never made its way to Russia, since direct contacts between Italian and Russian literary culture were rare at the time. The “distortions” the initial pieces underwent on their way—from Italy to France, and then to Russia (mediated by the German reception)—were enormous; this said, the final results were of world-literary dimension. Would, for instance, Chekhov have been able to conceive his modern reshapings of the tragic had he not been able to rely on

a thoroughly established practice of Russian tragedy-writing—initiating in the above-outlined multilayered processes of transfer and distortion—when he started out as a dramatist?

13.—There is, finally, one further crucial point thematized in passing above which still needs to be discussed in more detail, namely, the question of historically specific rationales behind the assembly of material extracted from the net. The logic or logics discussed in this respect so far have mainly been ahistorical, that is anthropological. For reasons of the limits of my areas of competence, this point can only be thematized with regards to Western (literary) history.

With this qualification, it is evident that it is appropriate to differentiate between two predominant historical rationales of assembly, in addition, perhaps, to a few minor ones. The large-scale parameters I am referring to are known in current terminology as the era of imitation and the era of innovation, in other words of traditional and of modernist art.¹⁷⁷ The epochs we typically refer to when dealing with cultural history (Renaissance, Enlightenment, Romanticism, Modernism, etc.) are minor entities which shall not be considered here, since their heuristic, quasi-auxiliary status has frequently been pointed out in recent scholarship. From the theoretical perspective devised in this study, there is no need to reject these categories, neither the major nor the minor ones. Their difference is, however, of a much more gradual character than assumed in traditional scholarship. “Imitation” and “innovation” translate in this book’s approach to a restricted versus a more and more unrestricted liberty to assemble random material floating in the net. And it would certainly not be unreasonable to see this gradual shift as corresponding to a shift occurring in the same age in the spheres of the political and of material production. The “democratic” revolutions and the mechanization of commodity production are factors relevant in this respect. I do not believe to have anything pertinent to say with regard to the question of where the “real” driving force is to be found.¹⁷⁸ Literary scholars have an unreflecting tendency to highlight the “liberating” role of modern, Romantic, and post-Romantic art with respect to society at large. Traditional historians focusing on the political sphere and “materialist” historians focusing on the evolution of technology would present different scenarios. I am not sure that there will ever be a satisfactory answer. The point to be

177 The most important theoretical work on this point was produced by Yuri M. Lotman, *The Structure of the Artistic Text*, Ladislav Matejka and Mark E. Suino (eds.), Gail Lenhoff and Ronald Vroon (tr.), Ann Arbor, MI 1977.

178 Regarding this point, see my more detailed speculations below (pp. 284 f.).

stressed is linked to one of the present book's basic theses: art production never takes place for its own sake. Particularly in modern times, art producers have to "sell" their products in order to do what they wish to do, namely, produce further artifacts (rather than become librarians, teachers, or professors). For this reason, they have to address their possible audiences or readers and their needs and preferences. These needs and preferences are diverse. The demands of the highly educated have another profile than those of "normal" people. But, as stressed previously, one should not forget that theoreticians as lucid as Freud never ceased to remind us of the commonalities linked to our physical nature, implying that the cultural differences we believe to exist between high and popular culture may be self-deceptions in the first place.¹⁷⁹ Leaving these differentiations aside, it seems to be a constant that there are strong links between the rationales of art production in a given period and the "production" of other societal spheres (politics, material production, dominant world views, ideologies, religions). The question of what or who the "prime mover" could be in this entire scenario of culture at large may remain irresolvable. But for the simple reason that art, and literature in particular, is created for people living under certain configurations,¹⁸⁰ it is not at all astonishing that the logics of extraction and assembly observable in this sub-field are structurally homologous to the parameters at work in culture at large.

Formal Organization and Mediatedness

0.—There is a point touched upon in passing on various occasions, amongst others in the above chapter, which might require some further elaboration. If one assumes with Vladimir Propp that literary texts, including dramatic texts, are comprised of elementary motifs whose referential bases are anthropological constants ("real" configurations, wishes, fears, fantasies), the mere presence of comparable items in different literary cultures need not be mediated

179 See the reference above, n. 56.

180 If a newly written text is not received at the time of its production, it may be that it does not acquire access to the net, and is therefore forgotten; but if the text is materially preserved, there is some prospect of it becoming "resurrected" in later times. For reasons that shall be briefly addressed below, the specific semiotic structure of fictional texts in general allows for their reception and reactivation under configurations totally different from those obtaining at the time of production (pp. 256 f.; see also my "Das Denken, das Unterscheiden und die Literatur", *Poetica* vol. 45/2013, pp. 249–269).

by processes of transfer as theorized here.¹⁸¹ It only makes sense to postulate that a given text owes its origin to another, pre-existing text, or to fragments of texts which have been received and reworked, if the texts under scrutiny are also comparable, in some way, in terms of formal organization. Formal organization may thus be considered as an indicator which allows for the assessment of the profile of an item floating in the cultural net with regard to its mediatedness. The truly difficult question, however, consists in defining the level of similarity of formal organization that would entitle an observer to speak of cultural transfer (instead of “emergence” or “creation”) as being at the origin of the historically posterior item.

1.—With respect to many concrete cases the question seems relatively easy to answer; if there is a variety of formal parameters characterizing “new” works which may be obviously assigned to works already floating in the net, there is good reason to make the claim of transfer rather than genuine “originality”. In the case of the Russian court theater of the eighteenth century, for instance, there is no doubt that the first texts in Russian owe their formal characteristics to imported French and English dramas (Shakespeare, Racine, Corneille). There is documentary evidence that there had been a previous transfer of actual plays from France and England to the Russian court; in addition, there is textual evidence that this transfer was made use of in the creation of the “autochthonous” plays, since these share their formal organization with the French plays on all levels which are not directly affected by the difference of language.—As to the *Griselda* story and its many dramatizations in early modern European literatures,¹⁸² it is not primarily the formal organization in the strict sense which enables one to reasonably postulate that the post-Boccaccian versions are drawn from the *Decameron*. It is mainly the configuration of personages, perhaps even of proper names, which allows for the exclusion of the possibility that we are facing different and independent modelings of a moral-philosophical problem which bears a certain universality, at least among cultures where strict female monogamy is the rule.¹⁸³—Things become more

181 As said, such an alternative approach to the problems here discussed forms the basis of Mayfield’s study (*The Vicarious*).

182 See Rüegg, *The ‘Patient Griselda’ Myth in Late Medieval and Early Modern Literature*.

183 The *Decameron*’s last story deals with a high-ranking nobleman who marries a virtuous girl of humble origin. After she has given birth to two children, the husband begins to put her unconditional marital loyalty and her readiness to accept strict subordination to the test. First, he humiliates her in public. Then he has the two children taken away, saying that he has decided to have them killed. Finally, he divorces her and obliges her to wait upon her successor on the occasion of his second marriage. *Griselda* patiently suffers all the cruelties inflicted upon her without protesting or revolting. During the wedding ceremony, the marquis reveals that his past actions were nothing but a test. The children are still alive, and the second mar-

difficult the more abstract the common features of two given texts are. It is, of course, striking to observe that the two most famous dramas of early modern England and Spain, *Hamlet* and *La vida es sueño*, are characterized by their combination of a basic oedipal configuration with a specific epistemological question, that of the reliability of sense perception. Given the fact that we are dealing with the two leading European powers of that age, and that their political and military enmity notwithstanding, economic, dynastic, and even cultural exchange between the two nations did take place, one cannot systematically exclude the possibility that the English play, or a précis of its action, came to the attention of Spanish authors of the next generation, that one amongst them, namely Calderón, received the *Hamlet* material and then decided to rework it, with the intention of delivering a polemical answer, inspired by Counter-Reformation Catholicism, to the questions raised in Shakespeare's play from a more or less agnostic standpoint. The lack of exhaustive documentation of cultural contacts between England and Spain at that time will, however, make it improbable that there will ever be evidence for such a configuration. In very many cases one has to limit oneself to expounding the alternatives and leave to further discussion the question of which is the most probable. In the case just mentioned, one could also assume that commonalities with regard to the oedipal basis of the two plots might be mediated by the authors' knowledge of Sophocles' play or—this would be a Freudian interpretation of the striking parallel—that they just emerged, independent from each other, on behalf of the universality of the problem which is associated since Freud with the name of the eponymous hero of Sophocles' play. And the discussions revolving around fundamental epistemological questions need not owe their incontestable comparability to a direct transfer of Shakespeare's play to the Iberian Peninsula. As is known not least from the works of Descartes, the basic assumption of skepticism, that is, the unreliability of sensory perception, was a problem which intrigued academics and intellectuals from all over Europe at that time; and there are evident external reasons why this question in particular was so important in that age.¹⁸⁴—For the time being, there is perhaps nothing more to be reasonably predicated with respect to the theoretical question outlined at the beginning of this chapter than to point to the fact that whether one should

riage was a fake; Griselda is restored to her former position as wife and looks forward to a bright future.

184 For a more detailed explanation of the link between the discoveries of new lands and the reemergence of skepticism in early modern Europe, see my essay "The Traditional Cosmos and the New World"; in an abridged fashion, I will come back to the entire configuration in the further course of this part of the present study.

speak of transfer and subsequent remodeling, of a parallel “drawing” upon a fund of material floating in the net, or of emergence (in the sense of “originality”) is contingent upon our own judgment, a faculty Immanuel Kant called *Urteilkraft*. The philosopher intended to designate by this term that, notwithstanding the irreducible subjectivity of such acts of judgment, they need to be “universally acceptable”, while acceptability need not be identical to consent.

2.—There are substantial reasons for considering the criterion of comprehensive formal organization as a convenient indicator of mediatedness to be of a less consistent expediency than one would expect against the backdrop of some of the above examples. Formal organization seems to be culture-bound. The basic mode of narrative is most probably universal. But as for (secular) poetry and drama, there is strong evidence that there have been highly developed cultures without these formal registers. Even more so, this holds true for more specified formal configurations, for instance tragedy, which originated in ancient Greece, but for which there is no equivalent in the geographically not so distant culture of early Israel—for evident reasons, as may be extrapolated from Old Testament narratives which contain all the prerequisites of tragedy, the story of Abraham and Isaac and the story of Job being the most prominent ones. The biblical stories do not end in disaster but, rather, in a complete restitution that one could assign, in terms of (classical) genres, to comedy, if not fairytale. A Mono-Theos cannot be conceived as a cynic or as someone who does not care any longer about what he once created. Or, to give it a different accent: when a monotheistic culture develops such concepts—as was the case in parts of early modern Europe¹⁸⁵—it seems to be a concomitant phenomenon that it rapidly loses its faith. The entire problem—the conceptual incongruence of the genre of tragedy and monotheism—thus evaporates.

If one adds to this observation the fact that not only traditional Jewish, but also Islamic cultures did not receive the pattern of tragedy,¹⁸⁶ one would be tempted to conclude that incongruences between comprehensive ideological features and cultural material floating in the net might be obstacles for an extraction of the material in question; this would lead to the postulate—if not

185 I am referring to the concept of *deus absconditus* which emerged in the late Middle Ages and had its most dramatic impact on European thinking in seventeenth-century France (see Lucien Goldmann, *Le Dieu caché. Etude sur la vision tragique dans les Pensées de Pascal et dans le théâtre de Racine*, Paris 1955).

186 There are tragic patterns, however, to be found in Yiddish literature; the Yiddish language as well as Yiddish culture are hybrid phenomena whose structures could well be conceptualized, I might say in passing, within the theoretical framework developed here.

of “national” cultures—of a variety of larger cultural communities, integrated by a shared world-model,¹⁸⁷ which, on behalf of the strictures produced by the respective model, are separated from one another in terms of cultural production of any more refined nature.¹⁸⁸

An aspect which should, however, not be neglected in this context is the possibility of disassembly, partial extraction, and subsequent re-functionalization. Worldviews and even religions are much more flexible complexes of stories and beliefs than is commonly assumed; for that reason alone, there is the possibility (but certainly not the necessity) of transfer of “heterodox” material under certain conditions which obey a logic not directly linked to the cultural material in question. The Christian West, while integrating the Hebrew Bible, including the Akedah and the Book of Job, into its canon, also received the pattern of tragedy. What remains to be discussed are the changes Christian belief underwent before classical Roman and Greek tragedies were extracted from the net after having not been extracted for centuries; at least as far as the plays existing in Latin are concerned, the reason for this lack of extraction was not a lack of linguistic competency. In addition, one would have to carefully scrutinize to what extent the basic features of the classical (that is, Aristotelian) tragedy were preserved.

3.—It might be useful in this context to consider in more detail the concept of re-functionalization. Within processes of cultural transfer, contents and even most aspects of formal organization may be preserved to the extent that one is tempted to speak of “imitation”; nevertheless, the message might be altered and integrated into ideological configurations alien to the original material. Tragedy may thus be converted to a form of (Christian and/or absolutist) didacticism, as is the case with many French tragedies of the age. The complexity of the issue here discussed reaches an even higher level if one proceeds to ponder the problem of why the ideologically heterogeneous material is extracted at all if it is acceptable only after its assimilation to the basic schemata of the receiving cultural context. Why rewrite a pagan tragedy as a play of Christian didacticism? Why not, if this is the final aim, just invent “new plays”

187 The term is Lotman’s (“*model’ mira*”); the semiotician posits that every narrative text implicitly contains a “world-model”, that is, an interpretation of the world and an explication of its state (*The Structure of the Artistic Text*, p. 210 [the English translation employs the formulation “model of the universe”]).

188 —by which I wish to convey that religious belief certainly does not preclude the adoption from other religious communities of basic technologies of everyday life, e.g., the manufacturing of knives.

which are anti-tragic and Christian right from the start? This is indeed what Spain did in that age; and the Spanish authors of the time rightly named their plays, including those with a bloody ending, *comedias*, or *comedias nuevas* to put it precisely.¹⁸⁹ Spain was, in terms of ideology, the most rigid community of the age. In many ways, its literary production “lays bare” what in other countries of the time was hidden behind a façade of *imitatio auctorum*. The still extant paradigms of the classical genre were, indeed, received; no early modern European drama can reasonably be conceptualized in terms of “creation” without taking the dependency on the classical tradition into account. The mediated profile of the humanistic dramas notwithstanding, they are to be considered at the same time as transformations—more or less complete—of the classical material on whose extraction from the net they are obviously based.

As to the differences observable between the specific transformations the classical material underwent in different countries, one might consider, once again, the possible divergence of the respective national scenarios with regard to demand and control. As to the “demand” side, there is an almost unrestricted commonality: extracting classical material was about elevating the “modern” European literary cultures to a rank that could rival with that of the *antiqui* by emulating their most dignified genres, tragedy and epic. But during this period, characterized by the establishment of the first systematically bureaucratized states in European history, the criterion of demand was in any case outweighed by the one of control, at least where these two criteria were in conflict.¹⁹⁰ In a literary culture such as that of France or England, where mechanisms of control were much more driven by power than belief, there was no obstacle to satisfying the demand of cultural self-elevation by adopting at least the label of “tragedy”. In Spain, the situation was different; the primary impetus of control was belief. Thus, Spain did not adopt the classical mode of

189 I try to provide an answer to the question of why seventeenth-century France extracted the classical tragic plots in my “Das Tragische der Racineschen Phèdre”, in: Niklas Bender, Max Grosse, and Stephan Schneider (eds.), *Ethos und Form der Tragödie*. Für Maria Moog-Grünewald zum 65. Geburtstag, Heidelberg 2014, pp. 295–313. The possible explanation given there only covers the one piece by Racine mentioned in the title. It would require further efforts to explore the more general reasons for early modern France’s remarkably “imitative” reception of Greek and Latin tragedy.—As for an archeological reading of the Spanish *comedia nueva*, that is, a reading directed against the widely spread modernizing interpretation of the plays as tragedy, see my book *Discursive Renovatio in Lope de Vega and Calderón*, passim.

190 In order to avoid misunderstandings: the primacy of demand claimed further above (pp. 54 f.) referred to the impulses directing the “creation” (the assembly) of a new work; the point I am talking about here concerns reception, or, rather, the frameworks governing the reception of artworks as established by diverse cultural communities of different ages.

tragedy; if it extracted its plots, it remodeled them according to the in tendency optimistic template of Christian salvation history.¹⁹¹

4.—Taking into account the entirety of aspects discussed in this chapter, the problem as such may be conceptually condensed by putting forth the following question: is there a means of distinguishing between works of art (or cultural artifacts in a more general sense) which are produced in the manner conceived in this book, that is, in a way that is contingent upon a quantity of pre-existing cultural material, and works which are “real” originals? It should be stressed that the state of being based on previous works need not take the shape of imitation; it may as well—as is frequently the case with works from the high modernist period—take the form of a polemical distancing from previous works, on the level of content as well as of form. Insofar as the distancing is not only part of the message, but rather its essence, there is no sensible approach to such works without considering them to be based on material extracted from the net.

Yet, even in the case of artworks which do not exhibit their “intertextuality”, it is problematic in principle to assume that they were created *ex nihilo*. If we exclude the possibility of the origins of culture being laid down by a transcendent power (by the gods or a God), we are led to assume that there was, in the history of humankind, at least one “first” narrative, one first tune, one first statue or painting. For all subsequent works of culture, however, I am tempted to hold that there is none that is not at least partially based on previous works. After the “first” start of what we call culture, originality is thus not an absolute, but a relative category. We attribute the term to works and ideas whose overall structures—comprising form as well as content—seem so different from previous structures that we *call* them “original”, although they are, to varying extents, results of a recombination of existing material. It seems to be the originality of the combination and the “convincing” character of its result which make us say about a work of art or an idea that it is “original” or an “original creation”—which means that in most cases we mean to say that it is “new”. Novelty is the characteristic of works and ideas to which we ascribe the feature of being something more than just a repetition of pre-existing works. The act of withdrawing a unit from the net (mere repetition) is supplemented by the

191 The above-mentioned remodeling of the in tendency tragic story of Orpheus and Eurydice is paradigmatic for the rationale that governed Spain’s dealings with the material circulating in the net which stemmed from classical pagan times. I shall return to the discursive strategies mobilized in order to justify this process of disassembly and reassembly in a later chapter (pp. 179 f.).

more or less thoroughgoing reworking, primarily in terms of formal organization, of the extracted unit.

The differentiation between “convincing” and “strange” or “aberrant” recombinations of existing material is to a large extent contingent upon the general historical dynamics of which culture proper is a part. The radical abstractionism of high modernist art would hardly have been received and accepted as “original” rather than “strange” without the context of industrialization, which is based on fragmentation, standardization, and the assembly of “new” items as a process of combination of such standardized material. I would speculate that without the existence of this horizon, works of art such as Picasso’s paintings of the cubist period, Marinetti’s poems, or the postwar *nouveau roman* would not have been considered “new” and fascinating, but, rather, “bizarre” products of strange or lunatic minds. Recombinations of existing materials whose formal organization appears audacious or even aberrant at first sight—that is, considered from the standpoint of the traditional modes—are accepted as new and original in case these artifacts suggest “answers” to questions pertinent to problems at issue during a given period within a given cultural community. Regardless of the fact of a complete breach of conventional modes, they may even attain the rank of “great” works of art.¹⁹²

5.—If one assumes that, specifically in the case of culture, there is hardly ever anything genuinely “new under the sun”, there remains the question of how to theorize the status of the above-characterized “first” narrative or painting or statue—that is, of the not only nominally, but factually original items—whose existence one has to postulate if pursuing the idea of culture as produced within net-like structures, and without appealing to the mythical pattern of a “first conveyance” by way of divine revelation.¹⁹³ In this respect, I would tend to

192 As a highly illuminating example for the general problem presented above, see Michael Fried’s analysis of Caspar David Friedrich’s *Rückenfiguren* as engaging with a problem of self-orientation which was discussed by Kant in his essay “What Does it Mean to Orient Oneself in Thinking?” (“Was heisst: sich im Denken orientiren?” [1786]). Fried does not suggest that Friedrich read Kant and then developed his paintings with *Rückenfiguren* as a sort of illustration of Kant’s philosophy. He rather conveys that Friedrich’s paintings provide an answer to a problem at issue in that period, an answer articulated by way of presenting paintings whose status as reactions to an open question indeed becomes more accessible when one takes Kant’s discursive treatment of the problem into account (“Orientation in Painting: Caspar David Friedrich”, in: M. F., *Another Light: Jacques-Louis David to Thomas Demand*, New Haven, CN and London 2014, pp. 111–149).

193 This difficulty might apply to the exact characterization of the first *homo sapiens sapiens* as well. So far, modern science has simply given her a proper name, Lucy, thus circumventing the necessary question as to what made this living organism, in contrast to her biological parents, into the first human being.

rely upon the concept of “emergence”, that is, on the idea that certain objects or concepts are not suddenly “there”, but rather come gradually to the “surface”, and that, consequently, their being recognized as coherent structures occurs in retrospect only. The “first” narrative, albeit a very short or elementary one, the first, even rudimentary pictorial representation of an animal, might not have been the results of a conscious *creatio ex nihilo*, but rather of gradual augmentations of very elementary units: a singular sound produced by an early human, or a bar drawn in the sand with a rod while pointing at an object, for instance an animal which was either a predator or possible prey. The spontaneous products of acts which initially were not driven by the intention of representation might have been recognized *a posteriori* to have such a representational potential. From this moment of awareness onward, they might have been intentionally used as “signs”, that is, as iterable instruments apt to convey meanings and messages to other humans. Starting in times when this potential became conscious to the human mind, the first traces of what is here called the cultural net emerge: the semiotically re-functionalized material items (sounds, lines) are able to operate as semes only in case this re-functionalization is—not even necessarily in an explicit way—agreed upon by a certain quantity of humans, the minimum being two. As soon as this tacit consensus is put into practice, the first and most rudimentary instantiation of the cultural net is already there. The “rest” of the species’ cultural history would then be a never-ending process of making use of the existing material by way of replication, imitation, disassembly, and recombination, along with partial re-functionalization. The postulate of acts of concrete extraction from this messy fund of material relies in any case on the possibility to refer to a certain recognizable profile of formal organization, while keeping in mind that “formal organization” may include content-related items, as demonstrated previously with reference to the classical and the biblical variants of a story of loss.

6.—The pitfalls of the net metaphor and of subsidiary constructs such as the metaphor of circulation, which become apparent when discussing the intricate relation between dependency on pre-existing material and “new” configuration, might perhaps be described in the following manner: it is useful to theorize cultural processes by hypothetically positing analogies to processes occurring in the material world or in the biological sphere (as in the case of the rhizome metaphor), if only to overcome all too idealistic views of culture as something merely spiritual. Nevertheless, to whatever or whomever humans owe this characteristic, it is a characteristic of humans that they have the ability to act in much more diverse ways than non-human agents (portions of matter, plants, animals). Non-human agents follow in their actions specific laws which are strictly defined. Human agents are certainly not free in the sense

postulated by certain strands of Renaissance philosophy, of Enlightenment philosophy, and of Marxism;¹⁹⁴ they are not reasonably describable by the concept of *alter Deus*. But their freedom to choose amongst different options, the possibility to mentally repeat experiences actually made in places remote in space or time or even both, the ability to synthesize items which are far more different from one another than fire and water, etc.—all this makes cultural processes so much more differentiated than their possible analogues in the material and biological worlds that the status of the metaphors designated above should not be anything other than that of a foil, that is, an optic device which renders the specificity of the object in front of it easier to define.

Temporal Incongruences

0.—One major difference between networks in the literal sense and networks in the metaphorical understanding (i.e., culture as a virtual network) may consist in the fact that what floats in the former is always bound to a specific period, whereas, in the case of the latter, there is in principle an everlasting co-presence of floating material dating from very different periods of human history. The temporal incongruences which emerge from this situation may constitute one of the most productive factors of cultural dynamics. At certain moments of cultural history, items floating in the net may contingently (or on behalf of external causes—this point remains to be discussed¹⁹⁵) hit upon material whose “origin”, in the sense of first observable emergence, lies in completely different times and thus within completely different cultural frames and backgrounds.

1.—To illustrate this thesis I should like to refer, once again, to the best-known drama of world literature.¹⁹⁶ The figure of Hamlet is mainly constructed around

194 It is quite telling that the anthropological optimism these three schools of modern secular thinking share in principle is on a constantly decreasing line. Marxism posits total freedom as an attainable level only for the stage of communism, and it holds that it will be only at this stage that the species will be able to fully live up to its inherent potential.

195 I shall not further discuss the question of whether it is more appropriate to speak in cases such as the one treated above of a contingent or of an intentional process as the origin of the “encounter” of cultural material dating from different times (“hit upon” versus “are combined with”). The simple reason is that I believe, after some amount of reflection, that there is no satisfactory answer to the point in question. Intentions in this case may well be (but need not be) *a posteriori* constructs.

196 My frequent references to this text are, to some extent at least, contingent upon the fact that I share the common view of considering Shakespeare’s play as fascinating; but they are no less conditioned by the fact that this specific drama is well-known to any potential reader

one semantic feature: his hesitancy. Secondary literature has the tendency to consider this characteristic to be a feature that renders Hamlet a particularly “modern”, that is, unheroic hero; this, however, is an assumption whose basis is the neglect of two historically distinct strands of cultural material informing the play. Hesitancy as such is the passive variant of the rift between willing and acting, intention and actual performance, the active one being transgression, in the literal sense of the term. This abstract pattern was introduced into the net as far as we know today¹⁹⁷ by way of the story of the Fall in Gen 3. Adam and Eve know what they are allowed to do and what they are prohibited from doing, and are in principle ready to respect God’s imperatives. Notwithstanding their intention to comply with the commandment not to eat the apple, they give in to the impulse to act against their conscious will, which is thus proven to be weak, or at least not as strong as it would have to be in order to resist temptation.—In Christian times, for reasons pertaining to the immanent constraints of the rising Christian dogma,¹⁹⁸ Paul generalizes the Old Testament constellation in chap. VII of his Letter to the Romans, making it the basis of his description of the human being under the condition of original sin. The entire passage is built on a rhetorically most impressive dichotomy of knowing and willing on the one hand, acting on the other.¹⁹⁹ Human beings do not do what they intend to do, but act more or less consistently against their own will, giving in to their spontaneous impulses, which are conceived as originating from their material part, the body. Paul’s argument is continued by Augustine,²⁰⁰ the first to extensively elaborate on what was later-on captured by Petrarch with the formula “volui nec potui” (I willed [the good], but was not able to do it), a phrasing which has the virtue of comprising the two variants characterized above, the active as well as the passive. In his *Secretum* (ca. 1350), Petrarch presents this configuration as the reason behind “Franciscus” being a person willing to act according to God’s commandments, but who is too weak to definitively abandon his predilections for *luxuria* (physical love) and the attainment of *gloria* (that is, the longing for earthly immortality as an

of this study. For whatever reason, *Hamlet* seems to have “survived” the fragmentation of the canon much better than many other dramas mentioned in the course of my argumentation.

197 Meaning: most probably it was introduced long before the text of Genesis that has come down to us was fixed.

198 Regarding this point, see my “Perception, Cognition, and Volition in the *Arcipreste de Talavera*”, in: Stephen G. Nichols, Andreas Kahlitz, and Alison Calhoun (eds.), *Rethinking the Medieval Senses: Heritage, Fascinations, Frames*, Baltimore, MD 2008, pp. 119–153.

199 Rom 7: 15 ff.

200 See *Confessiones* VIII: 20.

author).²⁰¹ While the Middle Ages developed a relatively benign view of the passive variant of the rupture between consciousness and action, known as *acedia*,²⁰² the age of the Reformation sharpened Paul's and Augustine's description of the nature of the will under the conditions of original sin. It was Luther who formulated in his drastic language this early modern variant of the concept of "weakness" of rational intentions in the most impressive way—by stating that it is not reason that commands the will, but the will that subjugates reason, transforming the latter into a mere "whore" of sin,²⁰³ that is, a force justifying sinful behavior by devising pseudo-rational motives.

Shakespeare's dramas are free of such Teutonic extremism. The portrait of Hamlet in particular²⁰⁴ draws largely on the descriptions of *acedia* circulating in the net before Luther made his somewhat radical contribution to the discussions revolving around the relationship between willing and acting. What Hamlet says about himself is structurally very close to what Petrarch conveys concerning the personage of the *Secretum* who bears the name of Franciscus and who is, at least to a certain extent, an *alter ego* of the author.—It is important to stress that when Shakespeare dramatized the question of the will, he did not draw upon classical sources that had been brought to circulation in the contemporary cultural net once again by humanism, but rather upon material from the Petrarchan tradition, that is, from a secularized Christian fund. Classical antiquity, and Plato in particular, considered *akrasia* to be a problem linked primarily to class and education: Those souls too dull to clearly perceive the ideas during their stay in the cave become the minds of the common people, who are inevitably subject to their bodies' desires, including concupiscence and idleness, and to aggression. Those, however, who are given the privilege of an "enlightened" soul have no difficulties using this "rider"—that is, their reason—to tame these two "horses", and thus to will and to do what is right.²⁰⁵ As opposed as he may have been in many respects to the lessons con-

201 For a detailed analysis of Petrarch's text as well as of its Augustinian foil, see my "Das Schweigen der Veritas. Zur Kontingenz von Pluralisierungsprozessen in der Frührenaissance (Überlegungen zum *Secretum*)", in: J. K., *Petrarca. Das Schweigen der Veritas und die Worte des Dichters*, Berlin and New York, NY 2002, pp. 1–53.

202 — which means something like "idleness", "sadness", "lack of initiative", "giving in to the 'natural' weakness of the flesh".

203 Luther, *Werke* (Erlangen edition), vol. 29, p. 241 (in *WA* [=Weimarer Ausgabe]: vol. 18, p. 164).

204 See Jan Mosch, "Heteronomy and Weakness of Will in Shakespeare and Racine", in: Bernhart et al. (eds.), *Poetics and Politics*.

205 Plato, *Phaedrus* 246a–257d.

veyed by his teacher, Aristotle remains largely in agreement with this view. To stay within the limits of *mesotes*—the reasonably conceived middle way between potential extremes—presents, in his thinking, no major problem for the educated man, while the uneducated do not even draw the Stagirite’s attention.

What allows us to read *Hamlet*—notwithstanding its debt to Christian moral theology—as more than a morality play in the medieval sense is the fact that the problem of agency is stripped of its overtly religious ties to the Christian tradition, including Petrarch.²⁰⁶ When Hamlet reflects on his shortcomings, it is not his failure to heed the imperatives of Christian morality²⁰⁷ that concerns him, but rather his inability to comply with the demands imposed by the norms of masculinity, patriarchy, and his status as a prince.²⁰⁸—From the theoretical perspective of this book, this observation corroborates a point treated in a previous chapter, namely, that it is the decomposition of units circulating in the net and the combination of formerly separate parts which produce innovative effects.

But the main point I would like to discuss is the nature of the prerequisites for the modern reception of Hamlet not as a highly problematic person (a “sinner” or an “incompetent aristocrat”), but rather as someone who embodies “modern man”. The Hamlet we confront in Shakespeare’s play is a problematic character insofar as he ultimately commits himself to blind fate rather than continuing to exist with his—as he sees it—split identity. Contrary to this traditional perspective, the modern reception transforms Hamlet’s negative self-evaluation into a positive one: hesitancy is no longer seen as a problem; to the contrary, it is considered to be the “right” attitude in a world where there are no longer any moral certainties. The evaporation of religious belief and the subsequent destabilization of secular moral norms in Western modernity have led to another breakdown of material circulating in the net, namely of the mandatory link between the recognition of the “good” and actual “action”. If the notion of the good becomes first relative and then, as a consequence, problem-

206 —who makes use of this tradition in order to subvert it (see my “Das Schweigen der Veritas”).

207 Concrete patterns of problematic behavior, such as the longing for *luxuria* and *gloria* in Petrarch, are not even mentioned.

208 The most provocative scene of the play, laying bare the above-described decomposition, is certainly the one in which Hamlet decides not to kill Claudius—although the circumstances are propitious—because the latter is praying and would, therefore, *not* go to hell after having been slaughtered.

atic, there is no longer ground on which one would be able to construe hesitancy as negative. The congruence of self-description and positive self-evaluation we commonly call “identity” thus becomes able to integrate weakness of the will. Modern—and even more so postmodern—male intellectuals no longer suffer from refraining from killing their fathers or their fathers’ substitutes; they have the tendency to cast themselves as “happy Hamlets” rather than committing suicide.

2.—The complete dissolution of the dichotomy of “good” and “evil” is preceded by the historicization of moral values. Construing reality as something in permanent flux first destabilizes, then problematizes the notion of the “good”, as may be illustrated with reference to another great play by Shakespeare, *Julius Caesar* (1599). Although the text seems to convey a position that is close to traditional morality by casting Marc Anthony as a “good” person, the spectators’ knowledge of what happened after Caesar’s murder informs the play’s message. The successor, Augustus, reestablished public order after centuries of civil war; in addition, he laid the grounds for the *pax romana*. It was his work that led to the spread of Roman culture to the north, including the British Isles. If it was an act of disloyalty to kill Caesar, was it for that reason a “bad” action? Or was it rather Caesar who had been the “bad” person? What was a crime at the moment it was perpetrated becomes an act of tyrannicide from the perspective of later ages. Hegelianism is the logical consequence of this process of relativization: if the *telos* of history is happiness in the shape of freedom, everything that has led to this end, that is, everything past, must in the final account be evaluated positively.

3.—One may legitimately raise the question of whether or not there are any generalizable reasons which could explain why cultural items circulating in the net are withdrawn as they are, that is, as units, and why it happens that they are decomposed and extracted from the net only in parts which are “used” in order to assemble “new” cultural material. In an age fond of the idea of “contingency” as the only principle predicable of “reality”, it would be easiest to say, within this book’s framework, that such decomposition occurs from time to time—accidentally, so to speak—and that by no means every assembly preceded by such a “decomposition” proves to be productive, while at least some do. Considering the examples given above, I have a slight tendency, however, not to conceive of cultural dynamics as completely “autopoietic” (in Luhmann’s sense), but as susceptible to “external” impulses. By “external” I do not mean “generated by another (historical or social) net”, but rather by means of constellations that first arise within the cultural net, but which would nevertheless be problematically categorized if considered to be merely cultural.

I should like to briefly provide an example: the move towards historicization—in the sense of an attitude that considers everything real to be subject to change over time rather than as instantiations of atemporal basic patterns—is evident in Western history from the Age of Discovery onward. While, up to that age, the Christian West had largely considered permanently evolving realities to be, in essence, “prefigured” in the narratives of Scripture, that is, in God’s revelation,²⁰⁹ the discovery of the New World problematized this “typologizing” view of the phenomenal world. From that time onward, there are no more pre-established guidelines as to what “reality” is.²¹⁰ If, however, there is no firm, trans-temporal ground of what one may consider “real”, there is no trans-temporality in the case of ethical norms either; what is “good” and what is “bad” become liable to reassessment under varying conditions.

As to the mere fact of the discoveries, there is nothing more to say than that it was contingent in the sense of accidental, if one wants to avoid the invocation of “higher powers”—in this case, of the Christian God deciding that the continents thus far unaware of the gospel be freed from the obscurity of ignorance in matters of faith precisely at that moment in time. Columbus was one of the innumerable megalomaniacal narcissists in human history. His good fortune and subsequent fame was caused by favorable (in this case: meteorological) circumstances which assured that he did not fail—as do most megalomaniacs, whom we never read about in history precisely because of their failure. And one may gather from the reports of subsequent *conquistadores*, particularly from the many “miracles” worked by God they invoke to explain why they prevailed under most unfavorable conditions, to what extent it was due to mere chance (*prospera fortuna*) that the discoveries did not remain an episode of European history, to be forgotten after one or two centuries—as may indeed have happened after the very first “real” contact of Europeans with the soil of what was later named America.²¹¹

But the fact that people from fifteenth-century Europe began to consider the idea that the world described in Scripture might not be the “entire” world, along with the fact that such ideas were not rejected as idiocy or heresy, is, perhaps, not contingent at all, but, rather motivated by the extraction and re-

209 See Erich Auerbach’s seminal essay “Figura”, in: Auerbach, *Scenes from the Drama of European Literature*, pp. 11–76.

210 Regarding this point, see my “The Traditional Cosmos and the New World”; see also chap. 5 of my *Discursive Renovatio in Lope de Vega and Calderón*, which deals with the antecedent to the discoveries, the Portuguese expansion into North Africa.

211 I am referring to the—as it seems—nowadays uncontested assumption that the first discoverer was Leif Ericson.

combination of material circulating in the cultural net. I am referring to concepts first identifiable in a decree by the Parisian bishop Étienne Tempier, issued in the year 1277. As astonishing as this may seem from a present-day perspective, one of the bishop's main tasks was the supervision of all instruction taking place in the different departments of the Sorbonne.²¹² The problem Tempier—an otherwise unimportant figure in medieval intellectual history—sought to settle was the presence of an Islamic variant of Aristotelianism which had made its way into the net under the label of “Averroism”. Without going into details, it will suffice here to say that in Islam, there is no divine “savior” who is said to have sacrificed himself in order to redeem humankind; accordingly, there is no need to conceive of all human beings as corrupted by something like original sin. For this reason, there is the possibility²¹³ of a radical rationalism. It seems that Averroes, for whatever reason, was one of the (not very numerous) thinkers in the Muslim tradition who took advantage of this possibility. Since his translations and commentaries were the main source at the Christian West's disposal for gaining access to the works of the one who continued to be considered *the “philosophus”* after the end of paganism, Averroes' own ideas also penetrated the parts of the cultural net accessible to the West. There is no documentary evidence which would settle the question of whether it was Tempier's own insight that the assumption of human reason's capacity to fully understand the world might be dangerous to Christian dogma.²¹⁴ In any case, in the aforementioned year, the bishop made use of his authority in order to anathematize 219 theses which were taught at the Sorbonne and which gave expression to the basic positions of a radical, Averroist Aristotelianism.²¹⁵ The line of argument to be found in the document is ex-

212 To put it explicitly: I am not talking about the divinity school only. In medieval Europe, the ecclesiastical authorities controlled the teaching in all schools (law school, medical school, the liberal arts college).

213 I should like to stress, specifically with present-day problems in view, this word. There is no cogent rationalism *inherent* in Islam.

214 There are hints that he promulgated his anathematization of Averroism—which, by implication, targeted Thomism as well—at the initiative of the Pope, Petrus Lusitanus (John XXI), who is said to have been an Augustinian.

215 The first modern edition of the document was printed by Henri Denifle, OP (“Opiniones ducentae undeviginti Sigeri de Brabantia, Boetii de Dacia aliorumque, a Stephano episcopo Parisiensi de consilio doctorum sacrae scripturae condemnatae”, in: *Chartularium universitatis parisiensis*, Paris 1891–1899, vol. 1, pp. 543–588; the above quotes are from the anathematized sentences 34 and 48). As to the document's importance for the intellectual history of the West, see Hans Blumenberg's *The Legitimacy of the Modern Age*, Robert M. Wallace (tr.), Cambridge, MA 1983; see also, with an interpretation partly differing from Blumenberg's, my *Discursive Renovatio in Lope de Vega and Calderón*, chap. 4.

tremely consistent. Tempier relies on the dogma of God's unrestricted omnipotence in order to fend off humans' pretense to fully penetrate the mysteries of the world by means of reason. Divine omnipotence, Tempier argues, includes the ability to change the course of the world, to add "more worlds" ("plures mundos"), and to add something new ("aliquid de novo") to Creation.—The most probably unintentional consequence of this attempt at reasserting Christian dogma in the face of the assaults of rationalism was nothing less than the debilitation of biblical revelation. For the argument implies that, as true as the world-model implied by Scripture may have been with regard to the time when it was revealed by God, it may be just as insufficient for a subsequent period in which God may have changed his views and intentions and may have acted upon these "new" ideas on behalf of his omnipotence.—It took more than a century, and the endeavors of William Occam, one of the greatest minds of that age, to substantiate and spread the ideas first written down by Tempier. Resistance from the ecclesiastical dignitaries was fierce, and the final outcome of the internal ideological conflicts triggered by the controversy was nothing less than the Reformation. The Roman Catholic Church continued to assert that God had restricted his omnipotence when he decided to produce the Creation, submitting himself to the laws of a *potentia Dei ordinata*, whereas Lutherans and Calvinists were ready to accept that God is omnipotent in the most fundamental sense of the term.—The intra-religious controversies being a separate phenomenon, Tempier's notion of a world or of worlds which may not be fully taken into account by what one reads in Scripture became, in its popularized variant, a focal point for many adventurous minds of early modern times, for early scientists as well as for adventurers in the more literal sense.

4.—Might it be possible to disentangle the complicated panorama just presented, which is only a somewhat gross rendering of the "real" intricacies to be encountered when dealing with the point in question? I have a slight preference to consider the cultural net and the effects produced by it as an enabling structure for events which themselves cannot be reasonably categorized as "only cultural". If a meteorite hits our planet, there is no man-made (cultural) logic involved; perhaps there is some cosmic or even "divine" logic behind it, but these are questions which are not of interest here. If, however, a man named Columbus reaches the shores of an island he then names "La Española" (present-day Haiti/the Dominican Republic), there is certainly more than just human logic involved, but, to a certain extent, the event is partly attributable to the workings of human logic; it is different from a win in a lottery. Above all: the event as such is real; it is not merely conceptual, imagined, textual, fantasmatic. And it is the event as a whole, not only its culturally conditioned aspects, which then produces "new" cultural effects such as the decomposition

of the unit (existing, I suppose, from the beginnings of human culture) which consists of the firm link between the “real”, conceived as eternal in its shape and essence, and the “good”, which is, consequently, likewise conceived as immutable. If the real reveals itself as liable to change over time, the good becomes, so to speak, de-autochthonized; it loses the firm ground on which it was able to grow in the past, becoming autonomous in the sense that it has to permanently redefine itself without any external vantage point from the perspective of which it could be consistently defined. One of the many highly mediated results of the processes outlined above is the creation of the figure of Hamlet—weakness of the will, but no longer considered sinful—and the positive evaluation of a “Hamletic” attitude towards life, as observable in twentieth-century modernity, but including a literary tradition that already begins with Flaubert’s *L’Éducation sentimentale* (1869).

Accessibility

0.—Up to this point, I have been discussing problems revolving around the question of how cultural “producers” might actually work with the material circulating in the net. I have thus postponed an aspect I shall now treat in more detail, namely, the possibility of gaining access to and then extracting material floating in the net. As mentioned in the introductory chapter, it seems to be appropriate to first of all take the problem of accessibility into account, and only then the activities of controlling agencies of any kind, a point I shall treat separately in a subsequent chapter.

1.—As to accessibility in general, I should like to nuance to a certain extent²¹⁶ my earlier rejection of linguistic competence as a factor of importance. Language does indeed count when it comes to accessing material circulating in the net. It was the previous diffusion of French as the language of the educated which enabled the smooth importation of French theater to the Tsarist court—a phenomenon accompanied and accentuated by a very literal migration, that is, of Princess Sophie from the house of Anhalt-Zerbst²¹⁷ to Moscow, where she took the name of Catherine and acceded to the Russian throne under somewhat questionable or, at least, obscure circumstances. One has to add that this “im-

216 —by which I wish to imply that it might be outweighed by other factors. I will come back to this point on various occasions, most prominently in the chapter on Herder (pp. 232–250), but also in the chapter “Borderlines” (pp. 99–115).

217 I should perhaps add, once again, that the language spoken at eighteenth-century German courts was not German, but French.

port” was supported, that is, mediated at least to some extent, by the German reception of French classical drama’s main aesthetic features (Johann Christoph Gottsched), and, in addition, by the activities in Eastern Europe of itinerant German theater troupes.²¹⁸ It might be a futile but nonetheless instructive exercise to speculate about what would have happened within Russian theatrical culture, and within culture at large,²¹⁹ had the heir to the throne married a princess not from an enlightened French-style Central European court, but, for instance, from Serbia. Once again, the example evidences the centrality of material agents of processes of cultural exchange. “Concepts” as such are not able to travel.

2.—The language problem involved in the example just outlined is of even greater importance for a phase of Western culture highly relevant for the period under scrutiny in this book. It was only the readiness of Western academics to study Ancient Greek, a process initiated once again by a migration in the literal sense—the flight of Constantinople’s Christian community to the West immediately before the conquest of the city by the Ottomans—which revived the “dead” material of classical Greek culture floating in the net, rendering it available for actual cultural production.

I shall dedicate some more detailed remarks to the “circulation” of Boccaccio’s last *Decameron* novella, the story of Griselda, in a subsequent chapter;²²⁰ in this context, suffice it to say that the enormous resonance of the narrative throughout early modern Europe was certainly conditioned by the fact that its translation into Latin by the author’s friend Petrarch brought it to a level of accessibility which transcended the Italian original.

218 The aforementioned book by Ospovat and related articles of his referred to in the book contain all the details and necessary differentiations of the above, cursory remarks (*Terror and Pity*).

219 As mentioned previously, (early) modern Russian drama and theater already originated, in a way, under the reign of Catherine’s predecessor Elizabeth, who was “autochthonous”. But it needs to be stressed that Elizabeth’s grandfather, Tsar Aleksei, had the first Russian court theater opened in 1672 with the performance of a play about Artaxerxes written by a German theologian, and that the first public theater, established in Moscow by Peter the Great, was mainly run by German itinerant troupes. Into the nineteenth century, Russian plays were mainly *peredelki*, that is, adaptations of Western and Central European plays (German, French, English) in Russian and making use of Russian names and places for setting the action. And the important role of Peter and Elizabeth notwithstanding, the systematic importation of Central and Western European Enlightenment culture into Russia (Voltaire, Diderot, the Brothers Grimm, etc.) was the work of Catherine the Great.

220 Pp. 141–143.

The reception history of the *Celestina*, as thematized by Sven Thorsten Kilian,²²¹ gives occasion to another remark pertinent to the question of the importance or unimportance of linguistic borders for the smoothness with which a given text circulates in the net. The *Celestina* was the most widespread literary text in Europe during the sixteenth century. It was translated into Latin; but there is indisputable evidence that the overwhelming majority of the translations into a wide range of vernaculars were based neither on the Spanish original nor on the Latin version, but on a translation into Italian that was completed as early as in 1506.

To formulate it briefly on a rather abstract level: apart from an all-encompassing *lingua franca*, there may be in certain contexts and in certain periods “partial” *linguae francae*, that is, languages read by huge portions of the educated. As my examples show, the reasons for such a status may differ. With respect to Italian in the early modern age, it is most probably the politically fragmented landscape of the country which helps to explain the phenomenon. Parts of the Apennine peninsula were ruled by the French, parts by the Spaniards, and still other parts by the Germans (the “Holy Roman Empire of the German Nation”). Educated people from these countries interacted in Italy, with the natural result that they exchanged views, communicating with one another in Italian. One should add that Rome was at that time the uncontested center of Christianity, and that almost all (male) Europeans who later on in their lives became “consumers” of culture took a “grand tour” of the country in their youth, for reasons at the same time religious and more generally cultural; the conviction that Rome was the cradle of the West was firmly rooted in all Western and Central European minds.

In other periods of cultural history, and for different reasons, it was French that assumed the role of such a partial *lingua franca*. Later on, and only with respect to certain territories, particularly Central and Eastern Europe, German played this role. Today, the fact is that if a literary work is not translated from its original language into English, it has almost no chance of circulating in the net beyond the borders of its own country.

3.—It may prove instructive to focus briefly on the cultural situation in India during the period under consideration, since it may help to throw light on a more intricate facet of accessibility than the more or less self-evident aspect of linguistic codes. It is not only in the age of colonialism that there has been an

²²¹ “*Escrituras andantes*”; see also Sven Thorsten Kilian, “Opening Spaces for the Reading Audience: Fernando de Roja’s *Celestina* (1499/1502) and Niccolò Machiavelli’s *Mandragola* (1518)”, in: Gvozdeva et al. (eds.), *Dramatic Experience*, pp. 13–34.

at times very vivid cultural exchange between the Indian subcontinent and Europe. As far as philosophy and belief systems are concerned, the lack of extant written material allows only for speculation—such as the thesis that Stoicism was influenced by Indian forms of quietism.²²² But as to the basic “tool” of all culture, language, there is incontestable evidence: the majority of modern European languages derives from the same roots as Sanskrit. Consequently, the distinction between “Eastern” and “Western” cultures has to be considered a merely conceptual one, a construction which emerged most probably with the establishment of monotheism in the West.²²³ The idea that there is no more than one god seems to have first emerged in Egypt and Israel, that is among tribes whose languages do not share a (relatively recent) ancestor with Sanskrit, which adds a further facet to the point just made.

If we thus assume that there is no “real” cultural gap between the “East” and the “West”, one has to raise the question of why what we call “civilization”²²⁴ was invented twice in human history, once in the Mediterranean world and once again, or even beforehand, in China.²²⁵ Direct exchange between the West and China remained very low-level up to the seventeenth century, and India as a possible transit zone entertaining close cultural links to both the Mediterranean and the Far East does not seem to have actually fulfilled this role, or only to an extent that was so minimal that no thoroughgoing transculturation between the West and the Far East was able to take place. The only viable

222 If one follows this quite probable hypothesis, one is able to conceive a possible explanation for a phenomenon that frequently accompanies processes of cultural transfer: the reduced general impact of the imported material, compared to the place of its first emergence. Stoicism has been of great importance within Western intellectual history, but its impact cannot compare with the influence of quietist attitudes towards life’s contingencies within Indian cultural history. Stoicism severed Indian quietism, so to speak, from its larger religious horizon. It is much easier to accept misfortune on the basis of a belief in metempsychosis than on the basis of the highly intellectualized Stoic notion that matter and all material things are ultimately irrelevant.

223 It is an implication of the above argument that there is also no insurmountable cultural “gap” between the Indian subcontinent and China. As to language, the distance is enormous, but as to general worldviews, Buddhism constitutes a factor of highly integrative capacity. I shall come back to this point in more detail in a later chapter (pp. 121–123).

224 In view of the focus of this book, I refer primarily to what historians typically call “high civilizations” (*Hochkulturen*), meaning, those stages of human cultural development that include (be it rudimentary) writing systems. Previous stages are considered only occasionally; according to the findings available so far, it seems that the civilizations of the Eastern Mediterranean and of East Asia had a common root located in East Africa.

225 The question of whether the high civilizations of pre-Columbian America were in some way dependent on cultural patterns brought to these continents from East Asia or whether there is only a genetic (pre-civilizational) link cannot be discussed here in detail.

explanation—which would be applicable, too, in the case of further non-European high civilizations, e.g. pre-Columbian America—is to re-accentuate the very material, that is, non-linguistic aspects of accessibility. Geological factors—in the case of China, the Central Asian desert as well as the Himalayan mountain range; in the case of the Americas, the two oceans—which favor or hinder instances of exchange of any kind should not be underestimated, at least as far as the pre-technological era is concerned. As may be deduced from the spread of Buddhism from India to China, such geological factors do not necessarily make cultures into monadic entities; and it was not only the Himalayan mountain range, but also the Pacific Ocean that our ancestors from pre-historical times succeeded in crossing, as incredible as that may appear to us. But, on the other hand, one should not ignore the fact that such geological factors constituted a serious impediment to a smooth, rapid, and quantitatively significant circulation of cultural material. Accustomed as we are to global communication's ability to overcome distance, it is difficult for us to appreciate the limitations of intercultural exchange between “different” and “distant” cultures in the periods of human history before the early modern age.

4.—But what is in my view the most important point to be discussed under the heading of accessibility is yet another one. One could provisionally identify the point in question as the receptivity of a given cultural structure to phenomena from outside. There is a huge variety of sub-structures to be pondered under this category. Because they are so important, I propose to discuss some of them—e.g., religious beliefs²²⁶—separately.

As to further points to be considered, the primary item might be basic social structures. Cultural artifacts are transferred more easily from one hierarchical and centralized courtly society to another than from a courtly society to a loosely structured one organized around federated kinship clans. One may infer from this and comparable considerations that after a considerable period of activity, cultural configurations will become obsolete²²⁷ in the sense that they no longer stimulate new configurations of the material they contain.²²⁸ “Nostalgia” for the past and identity discourses (the latter being based on the construction of “traditions”, that is, on historical narratives) are very recent phenomena in the species' history. One of their main implications for cultural production is that they render the aforementioned obsolescence-principle itself

²²⁶ See pp. 121–123 and pp. 281–284.

²²⁷ See, however, my qualifications of this statement at the end of the present chapter.

²²⁸ As shall be illustrated below with reference to the pastoral (a configuration of material that seems to have become obsolete), things are, in fact, somewhat more complicated than expressed above (pp. 226–230).

obsolete; under the label of the “interesting” or the “fascinating”, or under the label of “our” prehistory, cultural material manifesting completely outdated social structures and behavioural norms may thus be extracted from the net.

5.—One factor of cultural configurations in the sense of actual “works” which is of lesser importance than generally assumed but must nevertheless be taken into account when it comes to the question of life cycles (and thus to the conditions of accessibility) is the physical substratum of the configurations in question along with its resistance to time. Configurations transmitted only in oral settings have a relatively short life cycle as far as their ability to generate new material is concerned. Material circulating in the net orally is liable to rapid change, even to decomposition. It is only on a very abstract level (i.e., that level expounded by scholars such as Vladimir Propp and Claude Lévi-Strauss in their analyses of folk tales and myths)—that is, in a form identifiable only with difficulty—that they may be preserved for longer periods of cultural history. Paintings and statues, as is well known from the history of the artifacts of classical antiquity, may literally perish in case their physical substratum is destroyed by natural catastrophes, acts of violence, or simply the corrosive effects of time. On the other hand, thanks to modern technology and its capacity for reproduction, oral material preserved textually (in manuscripts, as printed text, or in electronic formats), paintings or sculptures replicated by various processes of a “compact” or “notational” kind, as well as musical scores may have life cycles of infinite duration. This dramatically enhanced accessibility may help “resurrect” cultural material fallen into obsolescence on behalf of its outdated contexts. In societies oriented around writing systems, such artifacts may be rediscovered by disciplines like historiography or philology, brought to the renewed attention of a broader public, and re-functionalized in a manner Schiller called “sentimental”. They may thus be re-actualized and become highly active once again.

6.—To continue this metonymical chain of characteristics, the latter remark leads immediately to the question of cultural institutions, that is, of agencies whose main or even sole task is to provide accessibility to material from the net such that it is continually re-circulated once its use—including its “re-profiling” by way of decomposition and synthesis into novel works—in the new context has been established. In societies that have created specialized institutions whose purpose is to keep material circulating in the net—schools and universities, for example—there is evidently a very high receptivity to cultural material of any kind, along with a strong tendency to subvert the efforts of ideologically-oriented control agencies to limit access to net-based material. The implementation of such institutional structures in societies where they did not exist previously or where they existed, but in very different configurations,

triggers in a spectacular way all sorts of processes of exchange, as may be observed, under differing circumstances, in the age of colonialism and in the age of globalization.

7.—Finally, there is a factor relevant to the question of accessibility which is worth considering, but difficult to characterize terminologically. In order to illustrate it, I should like to refer, once again, to the “merry men companies” investigated by Katja Gvozdeva.²²⁹ As already mentioned, these companies were amateur groups belonging to the middle or upper classes in sixteenth-century Italy who dedicated some of their free time to acting in drastically comic, even obscene performances, closely linked to their real lifeworld. Some inspiration was drawn from the classical tradition, but significant parts of the performances were “invented” by members of the group. The cultural practice underlying the phenomenon as a whole is the carnival qua instrument of the temporary suspension of social norms in view of the preservation of their overall sustainability.²³⁰ This practice may have had its antecedents in classical Greece (the festivals in honor of Dionysus), but its identifiable origins lie in aspects of pagan Roman culture appropriated by the Christian West. It is beyond my competence to answer the question of whether or not there are similar patterns of coping with aggressions triggered by the pressure of rigid social and religious norms in other societies.²³¹ Ridiculing the norms of civic behavior, including the persons in charge of guaranteeing their application, or rather the license to do that within certain institutionalized limits, seems, however, to be a rather specific cultural pattern. This may imply that performative practices belonging to this basic pattern can migrate smoothly within the space where the pattern is present, but are unlikely to be extracted from the net in places where the pattern does not exist.²³²

229 *Compagnie d’hommes joyeux*.

230 Bakhtin’s theory of the carnival continues to be one of the most valuable findings of twentieth-century cultural studies (*Rabelais and His World*).

231 Within traditional Jewish culture, there is a comparable social practice legitimized by the religious authorities (Purim). I continue to believe that modern occidental culture is a mix of Jewish, (pagan) Greek, (pagan) Roman, and Christian patterns. As all these cultures build on previous ones (Egyptian, Mesopotamian), this qualification is much less exclusivist than it might appear to “politically correct” readers of this study.

232 The violent reactions, in large parts of the present-day Muslim world, to the publications of some caricatures of Mohammed, the Prophet, in a newspaper issued in a provincial Danish town may be a good example of what I try to convey above: in cases where the general framework within which such cultural material has to be assessed in order to be understood appropriately is unknown, there is either no accessibility to such material or one leading to incomprehension only. If the material in question concerns features of minor importance, the reaction in the latter case will be an attitude of indifference; if more sensitive points, e.g., those pertaining to religious belief, are involved, the constellation might lead to acts of violence.

8.—These latter restrictions, along with many others, do not apply systematically in an age which is beyond this book's reach but which must at least be evoked from time to time, since it is almost impossible to abstract from the parameters of one's own age when discussing questions of cultural history or theory. In the era of modernity proper, beginning with the age of Romanticism, the West has developed—theoretically as well as practically—an approach to exogenous cultural material that one may call “exoticist”, “sentimental”, or “aestheticizing”. This approach abstracts artifacts or cultural material in a broader sense from its original contexts, from the motivations that brought it into being, from its former meaning, etc., in order to receive it playfully, or to re-functionalize it with a view to a serious intention which might be far removed from the original one. Against this backdrop, one could legitimately posit that nineteenth- and twentieth-century Western culture has developed conceptual and technical tools to enable an almost unrestricted access to the material circulating in the universal cultural net. This period has thus become one of a level of cultural activity unprecedented in human history, and, even more so, of a configuration which seems to be evolving towards a relatively homogeneous “global culture”.²³³

Borderlines

0.—In general terms, and the above-discussed partial restrictions notwithstanding, the circulation of material taking place in what is here called the cultural net is to be conceived of as limitless with regard to both time and space. The “day” of its creation is the moment when one of our very first ancestors as *homo sapiens sapiens* exchanged some information with another member of the emerging species, who then communicated it to a third member of the tribe; and its final “day” will be doomsday, the moment when the existence of the only culture-producing species on this planet will come to an end. If this day occurs before our progeny have colonized space, the territory belonging to the cultural net is limitless only as far as this planet is concerned.

1.—Conceiving of cultural processes in such a way, that is, as emancipated from humans' conscious actions, as taking place in an anonymous and erratic fashion, seems at first sight to destabilize all the ordering parameters by which we try to systematize what happens in the world. There are two fundamental patterns of such systematization. Firstly and most importantly, when dealing with

²³³ Relapses into a narrowly defined communitarianism, as, e.g., in certain present-day Islamic countries, may of course occur at any time; cultural history is never streamlined; it seems always to consist of dominant and recessive tendencies.

“events”, there is the parameter of the “period”, that is, of certain identifiable units of historical time; the notion is based on the assumption that the unit under scrutiny is distinct from other such units. Secondly, there is the parameter linked to space and its “natural” divisions, such as continents and parts of continents delimited by large rivers, lakes, or mountain chains, etc. What becomes of the current concepts of, say, classical Greek culture as distinct from present-day Chinese culture if all of culture is conceived as the reshaping of a huge fund of material circulating permanently in a limitless virtual net? Isn’t there even some self-contradiction implied in talking of the “early modern period (in Europe, that is, within a specific space) and the cultural net”?

It may constitute one major benefit of the approach I am proposing that it liberates scholarly discussions from the remnants of essentialist conceptions of ages and periods which continue to flourish, consciously or not, notwithstanding that there seems to have emerged a consensus that such categories are not “real” givens, but rather concepts specialists agree upon because they are able to account for many factors that are doubtlessly “real”.²³⁴ It would be problematic to deny these differences in favor of a concept of time without periodization. The technological capacities to submit nature to human goals and purposes attained in the twentieth century differ significantly from the level attained in the tenth century. In addition, there are evident “leaps” in human cultural development, that is, certain periods during which more “real” innovation takes place than in other periods of a comparable length of time. Between the fifth and the eighth centuries CE, there was not very much going on in Europe which would be worth reporting.²³⁵ Things are different one mil-

234 In this sense, even current dichotomous concepts like the Middle Ages / modernity, the early modern age / modernity proper, or classical modernity / the postmodern age do not at all seem to be devoid of sense from my perspective.

235 All such evaluations are relative, not absolute. There was some cultural transfer going on in the “Dark Ages”, too. As is well known, this transfer was mainly mediated by the Norsemen (Vikings), whose violent raids into territories as far as Sicily brought items of Germanic culture to the Mediterranean south and items of classical Roman culture back to Northern Europe. But it is very difficult to assess the long-term impact of these processes of transfer. It may be the case that the military expeditions of the Norsemen and their unintentional collateral effects in the realm of culture paved the way for the rather smooth penetration of Christianity and, along with it, Roman culture into the whole of Scandinavia starting in the tenth century. There are even (in my view daring) hypotheses that courtly love lyrics, the first vestiges of which are to be found in the so-called “school of Sicily” based at the court of the Norman kings governing the island in the Middle Ages, originate from Germanic patterns of interaction between the sexes, as distinct from Mediterranean ones. The fact that one is dealing here with ages that were not without reason termed “dark”, that is, which can no longer be rendered transparent, since there is not sufficient extant written material, makes it impossible to pronounce a definitive assessment of the intensity of transfer processes. From the beginning of Charlemagne’s

lennium later, that is, in the period between the fifteenth and the eighteenth centuries.—To put it succinctly: periodization is not invalidated by the concept of a (temporally) limitless net. It is revealed, however, for what it is: a heuristic tool by means of which we try to mentally represent the endless flow of time, considered according to certain value-related premises, or, in other words, ideological choices we agree upon within a given community to the point of not even problematizing them. In the case above, it is the parameter of human history as progress, that is, the occidental mindset that makes such periodization seem reasonable. From a vantage point inspired by other value-related choices, such an approach would lose its justification.

2.—I should like to illustrate this point by briefly referring to my own recent experience. My contact with Chinese culture has taught me a lot about cultural differences in temporal conceptualization. On various occasions, I have had the privilege to visit the finest museums in mainland China as well as in Taiwan under the expert guidance of colleagues, Chinese professors trained in China who specialize in the history of Chinese art. Over the course of time, I came to realize that my questions regarding the differences between the paintings of this or that period (periods are, as is well known, labeled in Chinese terminology not by conceptual, but rather by proper names referring to ruling dynasties) somehow irritated my guides, and that my subsequent, very speculative hypotheses regarding the “evolution” of this or that stylistic feature I took myself to have detected in certain paintings with respect to previously dominant styles irritated them even more. From this experience, and after reflecting upon these encounters with the “other”, I came to realize that a concept like the Western idea of history as progress or “evolution” does not exist in traditional Chinese thinking. It is evident that this conceptual “lack” is not contingent. Within the cyclical conceptions of time shared by Buddhism, Confucianism, and Daoism, there is no basis for such an idea. For the same reason, there is nothing that would correspond to the European concept of historical consciousness; it is not without reason that Chinese people tear down buildings when they are run-down, that is, approximately thirty years after their construction, and that they approach the carefully preserved remains of former times they visit on a trip to Europe with exactly the same “exoticizing” attitude with which they approach the imitations to be seen in places like Las Vegas on their next “grand tour”.

restitution of the Empire onwards, things are different. On this basis, I believe the above comparison to be justifiable.

3.—But if temporal borderlines may be highly ideological, that is, arbitrary, what about the certainly more critical conceptual borderlines linked to spatial delimitations interpreted as causing cultural differences? This point concerns the concept of “national cultures” criticized on many occasions within this book.²³⁶ Does the net metaphor, applied to the domain of culture, imply that there is no such thing as an “English”, or a “Chinese”, or a “native Australian” culture? In the case of space and culture, the difference between the still dominant conceptualization of Romantic provenance and my approach is not primarily linked to the difference between supposed realities and the awareness that these “realities” are based on ideological constructions; it is, rather, a question of degree that is at stake here, and, related to it, the question of how to give expression to different quantities (degrees) if one translates the differences to the level of qualities.

As to “national” cultures, it shall remain uncontested that there are different natural languages and that differences in language affect the facility with which a given cultural material circulates in the net. Works written in a *lingua franca* circulate much more easily than works written in a vernacular that no one other than its native speakers is able to understand. However, this does not mean that every single item formulated in a *lingua franca* (Latin in the period in question, English in present-day times) attains a degree of recognition comparable to the scope of the language in which it is written. There are a number of further factors, best summarized in this book’s terminology as “control” on the one hand, “demand” on the other²³⁷ (and perhaps, to add a third aspect that will call for theorization, “appeal”²³⁸), which heavily influence the degree of propagation of a material that, given its linguistic profile, could be expected to attain the level of universal presence.

Even in the case of material first formulated in minor languages, there is, in principle, no obstacle to gaining universal recognition. One cultural intermediary able to communicate the item in question in a less minor language suffices to turn stories “invented”, or, rather, synthesized within very secluded language communities into material that is generally accessible and even made use of; the cultural net is, indeed, extremely flexible. In this case, I am thinking in particular of the work done by Western anthropologists—professionals or amateurs in the literal sense, mainly missionaries—starting in the sixteenth century in the Americas and continuing worldwide into the twentieth century,

236 See below, pp. 232–274, the chapter dedicated to this question.

237 See the chapter below (pp. 134–150).

238 See the corresponding chapter below (pp. 202–209).

who brought to general knowledge and to universal recognition the stories of people that had not been connected to the larger cultural net for several thousand years on behalf of the facticity of spatial borders.

4.—To give just one example: the myths or narratives concerning man and cosmos created by the Mayas and existing since time immemorial were first codified in a collection named *Popol Vuh*; this may even have happened prior to the Spanish conquest. After the conquest, the collection is said to have been written down in Latin script, but in the Mayan language. This version was translated into Spanish by Francisco Ximénez, a Dominican, in 1702; the manuscript is still extant and belongs nowadays to a rare book collection housed in the library of the University of Chicago. In the second half of the nineteenth century, the Spanish version was translated first into French, then into almost all major Western languages. Its content finally formed the basis for the mythological horizon of a novel—nevertheless at least partially nonfictional—dealing with the brutal exploitation of the twentieth-century indigenous population of Guatemala by the US-American agricultural industry, a novel entitled *Hombres de maíz* (1949), for which its author, Miguel Ángel Asturias, received the Nobel Prize in 1967. From this moment onwards, cultured people worldwide have known about the stories originally composed by the Mayas, which means that the material has been (re-)absorbed by the universal cultural net. As a result, it is not only used for the assembly of “new” literary texts, but has also become one of the many components out of which present-day social discourses as powerful as the ecological narrative of a “sustainable” interaction between humans and the other parts of the biosphere have emerged.²³⁹

To summarize this point: in our traditional, Herderian thinking about culture, the consequences of spatial differences and the linguistic differences linked to them—which are, as such, uncontestable facts—are grossly overestimated. And if we consider without any prejudice the astonishing number of processes of transculturation that have taken place over the centuries, we should perhaps become skeptical of the widespread idea that structural differences between different languages condition incompatible worldviews.—It was not without reason that I just referred to the most influential “father” of the concept of diverse “national cultures”. The discrepancies between Herder’s ideas and my approach are connected to the former’s main contribution to the discussion, namely, to link linguistic difference to biological difference (“race”) and to spa-

²³⁹ Regarding this point, see my “‘Doscientas mil jóvenes ceibas de mil años’. Autochthoner Mythos und okzidentaler Logos in Miguel Ángel Asturias’ *Hombres de maíz*”, *Romanistisches Jahrbuch* vol. 42 / 1991, pp. 303–327.

tial difference (autochthony in the literal sense of being “rooted” or “grounded” in one specific place and of deriving one’s cultural impulses from that ground only, thus becoming “self-grounded”). It is this substantialist concept of national culture, together with its consequent features of mutual exclusiveness and of the appropriateness of cultural material only for its “own” people, that is contested by my approach.²⁴⁰

5.—This said, the concept of culture as originating from a decentered virtual net does not preclude conceiving of constellations of cultural material as characteristic of particular places and periods. These specific features mainly derive from ideological choices dominant within certain periods and in particular places; with regard to this book’s historical framework, i.e. early modernity, the importance of religious denomination—Catholic, Protestant (Lutheran or Calvinist), or Anglican—certainly cannot be neglected when it comes to discussing differences linked to linguistic diversity. As a result of ideological choices operationalized by what I shall call “control agencies”,²⁴¹ the Spanish language, for instance, is linked in the period in question to the basic patterns of Tridentine Catholicism; the (early modern) use of the English language is linked to a tendency to blur differences between or to avoid saying anything precise regarding religious denomination; the French language is linked in the early modern period to a surface structure of Catholic ideologemes along with a hidden strand of Augustinism, that is, of proto- or crypto-Protestantism.—Specific “national” features may also derive from political choices or contingencies; a centralized absolutist state tends to utilize material drawn from the net that differs at least partially from that drawn from the same network by smaller communities. Finally, such “national” features may be linked to the rank of the linguistic community in question in the hierarchy of powers: a dominant community such as France or England has different demands than a community in the state of emergence, as was Russia at the time in question. There is a multitude of further questions to be taken into consideration; for the time being, it shall suffice to say that there are links between language and the profile of cultural productions which justify continuing to speak heuristically of an “English”, a “French”, or a “Spanish” early modern drama or culture.

Nevertheless, there is one very important aspect with respect to which the traditional conceptualization and my approach differ not only in terms of theory but also as to concrete systematizations of the cultural field. If there is no “autochthony”, but rather specific shapings of material extracted from a common cultur-

²⁴⁰ See my more extensive polemics below, pp. 232–274.

²⁴¹ See pp. 134–150.

al net, specificity is nothing but a statistically relevant parameter; it is not a substantive designation, meaning: there are exceptions, and these exceptions may be of great importance. Allowing myself to tie this point in with a previous remark concerning religious denomination, I should like to briefly mention two cases I consider striking in this respect. In the case of Spanish literature from the period in question, there is a strong tendency—which I share in principle—to consider the works of authors such as Lope de Vega, Calderón, Tirso de Molina, and Quevedo as specifically Spanish in the sense of the term outlined above. But what about Cervantes? Translated into another language, and after assimilating proper names and places (by taking into account the associative dimension of these names; every country has a “la Mancha”, that is, a region which is considered remote and at the same time ridiculously retrograde), wouldn’t it be possible to imagine the *Quijote* as a novel from the British Isles, from France (the hero would then be a *chevalier provenant du Gers*), or even from Germany?

My second example is taken from the one European culture which in that age and even today insists more than others on its exceptional status, France. I am ready to concede that it is difficult to imagine pieces by Racine and Corneille as having been produced in other European communities of the period, since no other country developed such a sophisticated variant of courtly society as France; Molière, whose plays refer to a much less specific middle-class bourgeois world, would already be a borderline case. But my example bears the name of Montaigne. As long as one were to change certain references to the specific places where the ideas expounded in the *Essais* were first developed, I do not see any major difficulty in imagining the text as having been written in Dutch, English, German, or Spanish.—One may add a multitude of examples even if one limits oneself to the upper echelons of the canon; Shakespeare’s adoption as a “German” author and his status as the most popular playwright in my country up to the present day is another case worth mentioning.

6.—I would perhaps formulate the problem as a whole like this: our traditional views on cultural difference are biased by the unconscious tendency to take the fact that the primary “tool” of all culture, language, exists only as a multitude of very different vernaculars, as a legitimate basis for a reverse conclusion. Parameters informing a given artifact (a “work”), such as plot, genre, ideological frames (explicit or implied), message, style, etc., are, however, items that are conceptually separate from, and in most cases indeed independent of specific vernaculars. Within certain periods, and linked to particular vernaculars, one may observe systematic configurations of these parameters, configurations which then induce readers (or else recipients) to form the impression that there is, indeed, something like “national cultures”. These configurations are, how-

ever, never exclusive. The exceptions that evade the constellations they would have to take part in were the traditional view of autochthony appropriate do not consist only of marginal works; on the contrary, they are quite frequently classics of world literature. The concept of “national culture” is nothing but a heuristic concept. It is an “auxiliary construction” (*Hilfskonstruktion*), to use a term coined by Theodor Fontane in *Effi Briest* (1896) and later adopted and made famous by Sigmund Freud (*Das Unbehagen in der Kultur* (1930) / *Civilization and its Discontents*). But in contrast to the “auxiliary constructions” referred to in the concluding passages of the former’s most famous novel, and also in Freud, conceptions of national cultures may not be necessary at all in order to deal with finally unresolvable problems;²⁴² they might even prevent us from gaining a view of culture adequate for our present age.

Slightly differing from the approach developed by Stephen Greenblatt in a manifesto entitled *Cultural Mobility*, I have the tendency to conceive of the “open” processes of circulation in the cultural net on the one hand and parameters like “fixity”, “identity”, and “rootedness” on the other not in terms of an unspecified tension between two poles,²⁴³ but rather as a phenomenon of unintentional “taking place” on the one hand and intentional processes on the other. The floating of cultural material in the net is a given. It is a fact as soon as the human species emerges. Delimitations of specific cultures are in all cases instruments consciously devised by humans in order to fulfill certain goals which may be reduced to two causal factors, which I would perhaps label internal control on the one hand and external dominance on the other.

7.—We do not know anything about the process by which the “original” human family, whose mother has been named Lucy by modern scientists, split up into

242 See the long speech of Wüllersdorf, the superior of Effi’s former husband, trying to persuade the latter to adopt a more flexible attitude in order to make life easier, specifically by recourse to *Hilfskonstruktionen* (going to view popular theater performances, drinking a beer from time to time, taking delight in watching beautiful young girls playing in the public parks, etc. [*Effi Briest*, chap. 35]). As to Freud’s adoption of the term “auxiliary constructions”, see “Civilisation and its Discontents”, in: S. F., *Complete Psychological Works*, James Strachey (ed.), vol. 21, London 1961, p. 75; interpreting the advice given by the character from Fontane on a more general level, Freud posits that it is impossible for humans to endure the multifaceted and permanent frustrations, libidinous as well as aggressive, originating from the inevitable constraints of civilized life without recourse to such auxiliary constructions, which comprise, in addition to banal entertainments of all sorts, the fabrication of an embellished self-image.

243 See the reference already given above (n. 5).

two and subsequently into a very large number of tribes.²⁴⁴ We only have access to mythical accounts of the process—the most prominent for Westerners being the one provided in the Hebrew Bible—which do not resolve the problem, but rather attempt to compensate for the nonexistence of a logical answer by creating a narrative. The murder committed by Cain, and the subsequent division of the first couple’s progeny into different, mutually hostile tribes, is “explained” in Genesis by referring to envy, that is, the same emotion which drove Adam and Eve to commit the first sin, a feeling inspired in them by the “serpent” or Satan, that is, by someone who does not have his logical place in a world created *ex nihilo* by a Mono-Theos.

When it comes to historical, that is postlapsarian times, the emotion in question is in a way motivated. Its ground is scarcity: Abel is prosperous, Cain is not. Whether this is a “real”, or merely a “felt” material scarcity is a point of minor importance; in essence, the mythical explanation of tribal fragmentation and the one suggested by way of speculation in the following are compatible. And I am not very optimistic that the natural sciences will one day be able to provide more satisfactory answers to the question. On this basis, I would be inclined to see the emergence of cultural borders, that is, borders of language, custom, religion, etc., as arbitrary instruments intended to provide internal homogenization and external delimitation, with the goal of better equipping a given community in the competition for scarce resources.

The first step of cultural differentiation is most probably linked to the level of symbolic interaction, to communication. Once the primordial tribe developed embryonic stages of communication patterns—linking certain standardized gestures or sounds to specific meanings (“the potential prey is approaching” / “there is a danger hidden there”) or referring to more abstract levels of meaning (“the prey seems to consistently move in this direction at dusk”)—resources became scarce, for the simple reason that the predators (the first humans) had thus developed techniques favoring their multiplication in a way that exceeded the corresponding processes amongst their species of prey. In this situation, a particularly intelligent member of the tribe might have developed the idea to introduce different standardized signs for signaling the elementary messages necessary for successful hunting; he then may have instructed only parts of the primordial tribe regarding this “new” language, thus excluding the other parts from successfully partaking in the hunt. As soon as this device for excluding “others” and homogenizing those included proved to work, the strategy

244 Monogenesis of the species seems, however, to be the generally accepted hypothesis amongst present-day scientists.

might have become generalized. The fact that the intention and the result of these early processes of cultural differentiation was nothing other than the acquisition of a relative advantage in the competition for scarce resources²⁴⁵ explains the immediate emergence of hostility amongst the fractions of the primordial tribe, along with its far-reaching consequence: the readiness of the disadvantaged fraction(s) to migrate to territories unknown.—All additional features of “identity” (linking certain cultural patterns to parameters like “soil” and “blood”), including the most important one: the pretense to superiority (“we” are better than “them”), are mainly²⁴⁶ superimpositions upon the initial operation of delimitation and homogenization.

From a long-term perspective, one must also take into account constellations of cultural development already addressed by me in connection with the consideration that “human civilization was invented twice”, that is, of tribes or peoples who do not have direct contact over long periods of time, as in the case of the emerging Mediterranean civilizations and China. In this case as well as in similar ones, there is no competition directed at the same supply of scarce resources. But there is much cultural difference.

Given the fact that we are discussing periods of human history of which we do not have any documentary evidence, and based on the—by now, as I understand it, genetically proven—assumption of the species’ monogenesis (or: mono-emergence), one could perhaps consider the following hypothesis to be tenable: in principle, the further differentiation of cultures occurs according to the initial processes and functions just described. After one second-generation tribe has secured a territory of its own, that is, a territory isolated from other second-generation tribes’ territories on behalf of natural conditions (very broad

245 From the perspective of sedentary, that is, agricultural, and even more so of industrial societies, it might be difficult to imagine what “scarcity” meant in an age when humans did not have any techniques at their disposal for enlarging their resources. One should not forget that astonishing phenomena such as the migration of people from East Africa to regions as alien to them as the northern tundra, or even to the regions of eternal ice, were certainly not caused by our ancestors’ “touristic” curiosity; when they made these efforts of readaptation to extremely different habitats, sheer necessity was the motive. In the regions familiar to them, they would have starved, or died in endless tribal wars over scarce resources.

246 The above reservation is meant to refer to the special status of “blood” (family) bonds. For very small and secluded communities, such bonds are something real, not just ideological constructs. But as soon as one transcends the confines of what is called in our times the “nuclear family”, the assumption of blood bonds becomes questionable, as modern genetic science has found. The genetic commonalities between (first) cousins do not reach a higher level than the commonalities between random human beings from the same region; in the case of third cousins, there is no difference from the general average degree of genetic commonalities.

rivers, oceans, hardly surmountable mountain ranges, massive deserts), the processes described above occur once again—that is, as soon as the territory becomes overpopulated and natural resources become scarce. But the differentiation then takes place without taking the rest of the species, residing far away from the isolated territory in question, into consideration. Since there is no direct contact, it is simply not necessary for a premodern community living on the territory of what is later called “China” to develop cultural patterns that would help make it distinct from, say, a Phoenician community from the same period. But it might be very useful for the community in question to distinguish itself from other groups residing in the same region, who later became known as “Koreans” or “Japanese”. And as culture and cultural practices (even language alone) are fields with an extremely wide range of possibilities, it is not very astonishing to observe that, over the millennia, the differences between cultures remote from each other have augmented continuously—until the moment when new technologies brought the period of isolated existence to an end, that is, roughly from 1492 onward. Up to this date, the processes of internal differentiation within the four great isolated territories (Europe including the Middle East and North Africa; sub-Saharan Africa; America; the Far East) can be sufficiently described by recourse to the rationales explained above.

8.—As soon as the first period of globalization, starting in the middle of the sixteenth century, was completed—that is, at the beginning of World War I—there was no longer a community of relevant size that was not in contact with other communities and thus connected to the cultural net. What happens to the processes of differentiation under these historically unprecedented conditions? It seems that homogenization—taking our origins into account, one could perhaps even say: re-homogenization—becomes the dominant trend. Hundreds or even thousands of vernaculars disappeared in the course of the modern age; cultural differences became leveled by the establishment of huge territorial entities (nation states) and even more so by the establishment of (colonial) empires. In more recent times, the vogue of industrial globalization and of electronic information technology has led and is still leading at an ever-accelerating pace to a thoroughgoing cultural homogenization. With respect to the elite and the upper strata of the middle class, including intellectuals, national provenance has become a minor component of self-description as well as of perception by others.

This seems to imply that the insistence on cultural difference (“identity”) might have become a distinctive feature of the “subaltern” of any kind: the impoverished lower class in the old industrial centers; non-integrated racial minorities; worshippers of religions stuck in premodern patterns; underdeveloped na-

tions; and failed states. As blunt as such an utterance may appear at first sight, this seems exactly to be the case. Romantic patterns of thinking which were, two hundred years ago, the ideology of an avant-garde have become indices of a disfavored position from the middle of the twentieth century onward. The constellation is perhaps most evident with respect to the Third World—a term which has become somewhat obsolete in the course of the economic rise of countries like China, India, and Brazil. It would be an exaggeration to hold that these countries have evolved into parts of a homogeneous global culture. But from a Western perspective, they certainly appear less strange or foreign or “other” than they did thirty years ago. And it is an illusion produced by the impossibility of objectively judging one’s own standpoint (this term is meant in a very literal sense) that the reduction of difference and distance is a unilateral process of “ever coming closer to the West”. The West, too, has changed dramatically over the last decades. The dichotomy of body and soul, along with its normative implications, which forms the most abstract basis of the traditional occidental worldview, has almost completely disappeared from the discursive stage with vertiginous celerity. It is not magic that has caused corpses (in this case: Plato’s) which were able to remain intact for more than two and a half millennia to decay within two or three decades; it is cultural dynamics.

9.—In conclusion, I would like to come back to a few parameters already thematized to a certain extent, but now by way of highlighting single cases of extreme profile and at the same time of great importance, which might help to relativize—in the one direction as well as in the other—my above remarks based on attention to more general tendencies.

I should stress once again that the decontextualizing, romanticizing attitude towards the “other” which became dominant in the modern West has in a way leveled all inhibiting parameters mentioned above. But things may have been different with respect to the period at issue here.

As for language, I have already cited two examples of quite different degrees of importance (Latin in medieval and early modern Europe, French in the eighteenth century) which might illustrate that its significance is not at all negligible. Yet it may be that the mastery of the language to which a text is bound simply makes reception processes occur more smoothly, while a lack of language skills may be outweighed by factors of a different order which make an extraction of the material concerned desirable. The most striking example in global cultural history of a relatively reduced importance of language as cultural border might be the reception history of Christianity’s Holy Scripture. The fact that its first section, the Hebrew Bible, was conceived in languages alien

to Greeks, Romans, and Europeans did not prevent its wide reception. *Mutatis mutandis*, this also applies to the New Testament. It would seem that difference of language becomes a minor problem as soon as there is a strong motivation to appropriate an “alien” text. It remains to be discussed, however, whether such strong motivations exist at all within the sphere of artistic culture considered separately, or whether they are always linked to domains whose importance is typically considered to be higher than that of art—as is the case with religion, and as might be the case with economics or money-making, including money-making by way of industrial production.²⁴⁷

In periods after the astonishing reception of this linguistically as well as conceptually exotic holy text all over the Mediterranean world, religion seems indeed to become a marker of cultural borders inhibiting the reception of cultural material from the net, including in the present. One must, however, take into consideration the numerous cases in cultural history which seem to demonstrate that difference of religion is no less surmountable a border than linguistic difference. My disciplinary competence does not suffice to give a satisfactory answer to the corresponding problem with regard to the well-known phenomenon of Islam’s reception of classical Greek philosophy, namely of Aristotle’s works. As to Christianity, every scholar working in the field of European intellectual history is familiar with the two main tools—which are finally one—developed in Late Antiquity in order to make possible the almost unrestricted reception of “gentile” knowledge in the Christianized West. The first argument seems to emerge in the writings of a Hellenized Jew of the early first century CE, Philo of Alexandria,²⁴⁸ and was further developed by Justinus Martyr. It is known under the name of the “priority thesis”. According to Philo and Justinus, Moses and the Old Testament prophets were (historically) much older than the pagan philosophers, who “stole” all of their knowledge from the one and only source of truth, that is, Yahweh’s revelation. Hence, the appropriation of the gentiles’ knowledge is, in essence, a re-appropriation, an act which is not only “just” in terms of morals, but also unproblematic in terms of basic cultural parameters. The second argument is contained in Augustine’s

247 I am thinking here of the readiness of members of today’s foremost emerging world power, China, to acquire the competency to communicate in English instead of trying to impose their own language as *lingua franca*. Modern science, theoretical as well as applied, and all present-day international juridical documents express themselves in English. This is, indeed, a strong motivation for a huge nation like China to adopt this frame of communication instead of trying to change the situation.

248 The seminal publication on this topic is still Ernst Robert Curtius, *European Literature and the Middle Ages*, Princeton, NJ 2013, chap. 22.

famous allegorical reading of *Exodus*:²⁴⁹ just as the (future) Israelites were encouraged by Yahweh himself to take the Egyptian temple gold, Christians are encouraged to appropriate all the conceptual treasures of classical pagan civilization and to use them in the interest of spreading and systematizing the one and only Truth.—One may reduce these two rhetorical stratagems to one common origin, namely monotheism. If there is indeed only one God governing this world from its creation to its end, there is no substantive cultural difference between people of different times, different continents, or different belief systems. The only problem is distortion on the part of the nonbelievers, a feature which can be repaired by re-contextualization, that is, by “correct” interpretation.

The enormous absorptive capacities of Western culture, which later became the basis for the West’s global cultural dominance, are certainly linked to monotheism, or rather to the Western variant of monotheism. As said, I am not able to contribute anything substantive to the question of how Islam deals with cultural material that is, at least on the surface, exogenous. Christianity’s specific propensity to appropriate and reinterpret material is, however, not an indicator of the fact that it is a specifically “intelligent” variant of monotheism; it is obviously linked to the fact that Christianity began as a sectarian movement within an older tradition. All of its discursive features are essentially based on the pattern of reception and recoding with a view to integration. Consequently, from the standpoint of Christian culture, difference of belief is not a serious obstacle to the appropriation of foreign cultural material from the net. For other religions, things may be different.—Within Judaism, the situation seems similar to Christianity, but for very different reasons. It was the diasporic life which made it pragmatically necessary for Jewish people to receive all sorts of foreign cultural items. But it is only within communities of modern, secularized Jews (or, as one should rather put it, people of Jewish origin) that one no longer finds what one may observe within more tradition-bound Jewish communities, present or historic: the strict consciousness of the difference between one’s own (Jewish) cultural patrimony and the culture of those amongst whom one must spend one’s life.

10.—And what about the delimiting qualities of basic cultural patterns which are even more elementary than religions? With my standard reservation regarding modernity proper, I believe that they are of a certain importance when it comes to deciding whether or not to extract certain material from the net. But

²⁴⁹ *De doctrina christiana* II: 40 (60).

it would seem that their tendency to exclude is not absolute (as is the case with some items briefly mentioned above, e.g., certain geographical boundaries). On the other hand, the relevance of these conceptual gaps should not be minimized because they have lost their importance in our times. “Eastern” wisdom (quietism) has become an object of interest to the “activist” West only in the age of exoticism, sentimentalism, and aestheticism, and Western activism has become attractive in the East (India, Japan, China) only after a long period of enforced Westernization, and after the implementation of occidental activism’s material results: industrialization and commodification. Gautam Chakrabarti’s study on modern Indian drama shows that the reception of Western discourses of egalitarianism in the hierarchical caste-based society of India occurred only as a mostly unintentional consequence of colonization, as a reaction to the thoroughly materialist mode of colonization practiced by the British. And Eastern or “pagan” circular conceptions of time, as well as the texts linked to such concepts, only became interesting to the West as the significance of Christian teleological thinking began to wane, along with the influence of its secularized variant, the belief in infinite material progress.—All these changes with regard to the reception of material floating in the net constitute a strong plea, once again, for not neglecting the question of receptivity when it comes to pondering why certain material floating in the net is actually extracted or why it is “deflected” from possible recipients by cultural borderlines.

11.—I should like to conclude my deliberations regarding the importance of religions and worldviews for the receptivity of different cultures to the material floating in the cultural net by referring to a fascinating constellation dating from the inception of early modernity, an episode from Chinese history—widely unknown amongst nonspecialists—occurring roughly sixty years before the world-historical development beginning with Columbus’s voyage of 1492. At that time, an empire that had been no less ignorant of the world outside than contemporary Europe initiated expansionist activities that were in many respects comparable to those of the early modern Portuguese and Spaniards. Under Emperor Yongle (1402–1424) of the Ming dynasty, an admiral named Zheng He undertook seven voyages to territories completely unknown in fifteenth-century China.²⁵⁰ In terms of quantity, these expeditions were much bigger than the voyages of Columbus. The most significant expedition corps com-

250 See Wang Gungwu, *China and the Chinese Overseas*, Singapore 1992; see also Edward L. Dreyer, *Zheng He: China and the Oceans in the Early Ming Dynasty, 1405–1433*, New York, NY 2007.—I am indebted to my colleague Lee Cheuk Yin from the National University of Singapore for having drawn my attention to this episode of Chinese history.

prised over 300 ships equipped with some 27,000 sailors and trade men, including 62 huge ships carrying trade goods. As was the case with Columbus, the primary intention of the Chinese expeditions was economic: the goods carried by the cargo ships consisted mainly of silk and porcelain. Zheng He's expeditions were initially aimed at opening up rather nearby ports and countries for Chinese luxury goods: Cambodia, Siam, Brunei, Sumatra, Malacca, Ceylon, Kerala, etc. But the following expeditions reached places like Hormuz, Aden, Jeddah, Mecca, Mogadishu, and even Malindi on the coast of East Africa, that is, places with regard to which the initial motivation to sell Chinese luxury products can hardly be considered primary.

The most intriguing feature linked to these expeditions in the context here discussed is the fact that the early modern Chinese expansion stopped at this point. There were neither attempts at penetrating into regions north of Mecca, nor were there attempts at circumnavigating Africa in order to reach horizons totally unknown. This is all the more striking as it was exactly this that Columbus's emulators undertook when they made a similar trip, albeit in the other direction: when Vasco da Gama reached Malindi in 1498, he did not hesitate to explore further eastward, thus finding what Columbus had only believed to have found, a maritime route to India. By contrast, the early modern Chinese expansion, considered by some scholars to be proto-colonial,²⁵¹ was stopped soon after Emperor Yongle died, and *Zhongguo* (the Middle Kingdom) resumed its attitude of strict Sinocentrism and isolationism, which ended only with the Opium Wars (1839–1860) and the subsequent enforced integration of the country into a more and more globalized world.

All explanations of this constellation must of necessity remain speculative, since there are no documents that would instruct us about the reasons behind this double paradigm shift in China's attitude towards the rest of the world, whose result was the confirmation of the traditional parochialism.—One element to be taken into consideration, as I should like to suggest, is the biographical background of the central figure of this episode: As a boy of thirteen years of age, Zheng He had been captured by imperial troops in the course of a turmoil between the Han and Muslim Chinese, a minority he and his family were part of, and had been castrated. Later on, he made a remarkable career, leading him to the position of Grand Eunuch at the imperial court. The ambition to reach Mecca in order to sell Chinese silk to the Arabians of the peninsu-

251 See Geoff Wade, "The Zheng He Voyages: A Reassessment", *Asia Research Institute, National University of Singapore, Working Papers Series* vol. 31 / 2004, pp. 1–33.

la might thus have involved the covert intention to redress the coerced abandonment of his original belief.

But there was no religious necessity to go to places like Kerala, and even less to Malindi. I would suggest that it was the universalism inherent in Islam, no less than in Christianity, that facilitated Zheng He's attitude to boldly transcend the limits of what most Chinese considered to be the center of the world. And the decision of his imperial protector's successors not to carry on with this expansionism may testify, once again, to the fact that Zheng He's activities were contingent upon world-modeling parameters alien to traditional Chinese culture.—If one is ready to consider the entire “Chinese” scenario in comparison with what happened in Europe some decades later, the constellation is a very strong plea for the type of assessment suggested here: The fact that Columbus succeeded in arriving at a coast instead of losing his life is contingent; “new” technological devices like the quadrant may have facilitated the trip to territories unknown. But the attitude of not considering one's own country or civilization to constitute the world as such, along with the quest for the “novel”, calls for an explanation that goes beyond such materialist parameters. Ideological universalism seems to be one of the mightiest factors when it comes to discussing the question of why and how the “partial” cultural nets resulting from the primordial tribal fragmentation became reunited in an age that we call early modern²⁵² because it anticipates characteristics which developed more fully in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

Transnational Cultural Agencies

0.—In the introduction, I gave expression to the assumption that the floating of cultural material is in most cases, at least in the age under scrutiny here, mediated by humans—by merchants, warriors, spouses, missionaries, diplomats, artists, actors, etc., that is, by people who level the borderlines discussed in the previous chapter, at least those of a spatial or merely conceptual (ideological) order. The enumeration is evidently heterogeneous, as it comprises both active, conscious agents of cultural transfer (missionaries, actors, artists) and people without the conscious intention of transferring cultural material (merchants and warriors). But since these latter individuals, too, are humans,

²⁵² I do not repeat in the above paragraph my answer to the question of why the theoretical universalism inherent in Christianity did not have such practical implications until this point in time (see pp. 89–91).

i.e., beings with a cultural background, it is inevitable that they transport not only goods or arms, but the complete range of cultural material they carry in their minds: concepts, norms, patterns of behavior, body language, and the memories of works of art that made a strong impression on them. One is tempted to say that for most of human history, cultural transmission was such an affair. It simply happened, with no conscious intent to promote *cultural* circulation.

1.—The entire historical process which laid the basis for what later became Europe was initiated by such an unintentional “export” of culture. When the Romans first conquered present-day France, then parts of what would later become England and Germany, their intention was not to propagate Greco-Roman culture. They wanted to put a halt to the barbarian incursions into Roman territories, which were motivated by material greed. But in order to sustain the *Pax Romana*, it was ultimately necessary to definitively subjugate these limitrophic tribes, that is, to install Roman garrisons on foreign territory. Roman troops lived in these *coloniae* on a permanent basis. Consequently, a need arose for Roman culture in these places—for everyday culture in the first place, but also for the more sophisticated facets of it, e.g., arenas, places suited for public performances. As time went by, the subjugated locals began to take an interest in these instances of Mediterranean culture transplanted to Western and Northern Europe. And some centuries later, when the Empire collapsed under the military pressure of tribes from parts of present-day Europe which had not been conquered, mainly from Scandinavia, the native people of present-day France, England, and Southern and Western Germany had become so familiar with the culture brought to them by way of violent military conquest that they considered it to be their “own”, even succeeding in convincing the newly arrived barbarian tribes to adopt these patterns as well, whose origins lie in Mesopotamia, Egypt, Israel, and Greece.

2.—Cultural exportation as a conscious pattern of behavior seems so natural to present-day Westerners that it might be difficult to conceptualize the extent to which it is a specific way of dealing with culture. I would hypothesize that there is one indispensable prerequisite for consciously propagating one’s own culture outside of its original territory, namely, universalism, understood as the conviction that all human beings are equal and thus apt to live within comparable, if not identical cultural frames. This idea—revolutionary in the history of humankind—first originates with the emergence of Christianity; it is reinforced by the emergence of the second universalistic religion, Islam, and becomes a pattern of world-historical impact in the age of its secularization. “Human rights” is a concept based on the assumption not of the corporeal sameness of human beings, but of their “essential” sameness. Whatever this

essence may be, the postulate of essential equality translates to the level of observable phenomena as the assumption of equal rights, equal wishes and aspirations, and equal norms of good and evil. In regions of the planet where there is no “autochthonous” ideological universalism, for example India and China, there is much less conscious cultural exportation to be observed than in the case of the West.²⁵³

Since we are considering here not only 2,000 years, but a period beginning with the emergence of the very first humans (150,000 years), it is important to state that the majority of cultural transfer is a parasitic phenomenon. As conscious activity, it is bound to specific ideological constellations. And it is not without reason that present-day global culture is mainly Western. Islam, which is in principle as able as the West to become the hub of a universalistic global culture, is caught in the shackles of its own tradition and the subsequent incapacity to develop modern technologies, including culturally relevant ones, of its own.²⁵⁴

3.—If one limits the scope to the age of universalism, it becomes requisite to add to the panorama of features favoring the floating of material in the virtual network of culture a phenomenon not considered as yet: the existence of agencies of transculturation.—I shall start by hinting at a striking textual example which is apt to elucidate the enormous impact of these agencies on cultural evolution in particular in early modern times. Drnovšek’s study on the *Škofjel-oški pasijon* (1725),²⁵⁵ the first text written in the Slovene language still extant today, opens up a particularly illuminating perspective on a more general constellation that is frequently overlooked in a period whose basic parameters continue to be heavily influenced by the concept of “national cultures”. As the

253 I will formulate some remarks concerning Buddhism in the course of this chapter.

254 As to possible reasons for this difference between cultures with a Christian and cultures with an Islamic background, see my “Christentum, Judentum, Islam – Säkulare Welt und Geschichtlichkeit”, in: Andreas Kablitz and Christoph Marksches (eds.), *Heilige Texte. Religion und Rationalität*, Berlin and Boston, MA 2013, pp. 141–166.—My above remarks concerning Islam may at first sight seem naïve, given the virtuosic usage of technological patterns developed in the West for a cultural-religious expansionism on the part of jihadists, starting with Khomeini. But as I shall argue in the chapter “Control and Demand”, I doubt that totalitarian systems of any kind are sustainable. The main obstacle that present-day political Islam will have more and more to face becomes evident when considering post-Khomeini Iran: the instrumentalization of Western technologies for purposes of parochial cultural-political propagation “establishes”, as it were, the presence of these technological devices on the territory controlled by the totalitarian system in question. Once established, these devices may be used to gain access to cultural (ideological, political, artistic) material ostracized by the regime.

255 “*Certa Mina Dant VICTorlas*”. See also Jaša Drnovšek, “Early Modern Religious Processions: The Rise and Fall of a Political Genre”, in: Bernhart et al. (eds.), *Poetics and Politics*.

title states, the text is a Passion play; in this specific case, it was performed as a processional play. It displays various characteristics which make it a useful source to be studied within a project on early modern European drama. But what counts from a more theoretical perspective is the fact that the play's plot has nothing "Slovene" about it, as well as the fact that the performative practice of the processional play, which levels the distance between stage and spectators and thus enhances the emotional involvement of the recipients, is not a feature that belongs to a specifically Slovene culture. From the Middle Ages onward, plays presenting Christ's Passion are documented in many European countries, and the practice of the processional play, which may have been ubiquitous in the West, is particularly well documented in the case of Spain.²⁵⁶

None of these details would surprise a scholar of the historical and literary scenario in question. But the enabling structure of these and similar phenomena is frequently neglected when we talk about (European) cultures: from the early Middle Ages onward, there were not only itinerant individuals (merchants, warriors) transporting, more or less unintentionally, cultural items, but also cultural agencies with the conscious aim of surmounting national and linguistic borders. The most important of these agencies, and perhaps the only one amongst those to be mentioned which conceived of cultural transfer as its primary task—and not, as in the case of the other agencies, as a concomitant feature of several diverse activities—was the Roman Catholic Church. Its dogma is universalistic; the Church considers as its mission to proselytize all humans, regardless of their language or ethnicity. On behalf of this radically "global" attitude, Catholicism was right from its establishment as the official cult of the Roman Empire onward, that is, starting in the fourth century CE, a most powerful agent of encouraging the circulation of material in the cultural net and even more so of expanding the net. The more it became institutionalized, the more the Church systematically exported its cultural material from its main seat, Rome, not only to all European countries, but also, after the European conquest of other parts of the world, to almost any kind of "national culture". No one will be surprised to hear that Christian didactic drama was exported to Latin America after 1492. But it might be at first sight astonishing to register that such plays were performed in somewhat exotic parts of the world as well, for instance, in Indian Goa and in Japan.—It is worth noting in passing that

256 It might be known even outside the country that there is one such procession play that continues to flourish in present-day Germany, the *Oberammergauer Passionsspiel*. It is performed only every tenth year and, in terms of function, has at least partially become an element of present-day "event culture", where the religious and ritual background has only, if at all, a secondary importance.

in the above-mentioned Slovene Passion play, allegories of the non-European continents America, Asia, and Africa appear on stage in order to express their gratitude for the “mercy” that Catholicism showed in bringing salvation to their people. This clear-cut universalistic profession is all the more remarkable as Slovenia was not at all involved in the process of spreading Christian-European culture around the globe.—The human agents of the Church’s net-bound activities were mainly the members of monastic orders (the Capuchins and, in later periods, the Jesuits), but also such dignitaries as bishops and archbishops, people whose self-description was not primarily focused on national or ethnic belonging, but rather on the self-chosen role of minister (that is, servant) of a God who, according to their belief, had created all of humankind and then redeemed it by way of an act of self-sacrifice. Those who had been permitted on behalf of divine grace to gain access to the revealed truth had to earn (*mereri*) this grace retrospectively and make it thereby efficient (*gratia efficax*), not least by propagating the truth amongst those who did not have the privilege of first access.

There is one additional point to be made with regard to this most powerful transnational cultural agency of the period in question. The institution of the Church is linked to a specific ideology. It thus has a strong tendency to function not only as a propagator of cultural material, but at the same time as a control agency in the sense that will be detailed below. What was actively circulated by the Roman Church was a carefully chosen and determinate set of cultural features. However, since the circulation was mainly carried out by humans and not only by exporting books—that is, by monks or ecclesiastical dignitaries from countries like Spain, Italy, and France migrating to countries like Slovenia, Goa, Brazil, and Japan—it was more or less inevitable that these humans also carried in their mental luggage all sorts of cultural material which might have been considered problematic from the strictly defined standpoint of religious orthodoxy. While the primary focus of their conscious cultural activities was certainly the propagation of a specific message and the control of all possible heterodoxy, it might be the case that there was an unintentional dialectic at work here: since even a highly orthodox person can be orthodox only by constantly repressing anything that is not systematically orthodox within his or her own thinking, he or she inevitably becomes a means of unintentionally transporting cultural material that exceeds the limits of religious orthodoxy.—The impetus for cultural propagation of a material that transgresses the limits of the strictly defined dogmatic core is reinforced by a central characteristic of the Christian religion already mentioned above, namely its absorptive attitude with regard to previous traditions, in particular with regard to aspects of the Jewish and the pagan Mediterranean discursive spheres. The dogma, the ritual-

istic practices, and the religious arts (architecture, paintings, catechizing texts and performances) are assembled from pre-existing material and a very limited set of “novel” concepts which are novel only with respect to the new context into which they are integrated.²⁵⁷ Since Christianity emerged on the terrain of a firmly established written culture, which was moreover developing techniques of storage of cultural material such as libraries, the elements out of which the Christian discourse was assembled also remained present in the cultural net in their unassimilated versions. This presence “*sub utraque specie*” was, as may be extrapolated from European cultural history, a permanent invitation to all users of the cultural net to disassemble the conceptual configurations that constitute what we call Christianity and to make use of the elements for secular purposes.²⁵⁸

4.—Considering the immense contribution made by members of the religious orders, in the first place the Jesuits, to the transportation of cultural material of all kinds—that is, not only religious—and in both directions (from the West to the colonies and vice versa), one might think that Catholicism was and perhaps is a much more important human “device” enabling the floating of material in the cultural net than Protestantism. And, indeed, the Protestant accentuation of the believers’ direct access to divine revelation as mediated by Scripture has meant that all Reformed denominations are ultimately linked to specific linguistic communities. Their pretense to the universality that is in principle a feature of Christianity in general is restricted by the abolishment of the mediating role of the clergy and by the ensuing relative parochialism. In that sense, Protestantism was one of the most powerful agents of the emergence of nationalism. In addition, the Reformation allowed the clergy to marry

257 To give just one example: the ethical component of Christianity may be described as a continuation and partial radicalization of the set of norms contained in the Decalogue, that is, in the Jewish tradition. The emerging religion detaches this ethical fund from the entire complex of ritualistic practices. It then adds to this remaining ethical component elements deriving from Eastern Mediterranean mystical religions, mainly of Egyptian provenance (the incarnation of gods by way of “regular” birth; resurrection; eternal life). In order to principally distance itself from the Jewish religion, it attaches to this compound the vaguely elaborated universalistic tendencies implied in other cults that were widespread at the time (Isis; Mithras), while fusing them with monotheism and thereby radically accentuating them.

258 A prime example already touched upon in this book (and described in detail in chap. 3 of my *Discursive Renovatio in Lope de Vega and Calderón*) is the “subjugation” of the stories of Greek myth by way of allegorizing, occurring in the Middle Ages, and the “liberation” of the mythical fund from this superstructure, occurring in the era we are used to calling the “Renaissance”; as to the possible reasons behind this and comparable evolutions, see above, pp. 89–91.

and to raise families; consequently, Protestant ministers were in less of a position to dedicate their energies to interaction with believers—actual as well as potential—than Catholic priests, monks, or nuns.

This constellation notwithstanding, there were considerable Protestant missionary activities in non-Western countries. The processes of cultural transfer that accompanied these activities had, at least in part, a slightly different profile from those accompanying Catholic proselytizing. The marital status of Protestant missionaries allowed them to have children. The latter typically grew up in parts of the world whose cultural parameters differed from those of the West. Almost all of them were educated people. Some of them became ministers, but most chose to exercise secular professions; as is the case in the homelands of Protestantism, quite a few became scholars or scientists. In a considerable number of cases, they remained as adults in the countries where they had been born and raised. As a consequence of this chain of conditioning factors, many of them became professional agents of cultural transfer. They taught the locals what Western science and humanities were, and they made the local flora and fauna, as well as the local culture, into objects of Western-style scientific or scholarly scrutiny. A significant structural difference between the mediating activities of this group and those of the Catholic missionaries consists in the fact that the former were “professionals” in what they did, whereas the latter were dilettantes in the very literal meaning of the term. Particularly in an age when research in the sciences and the humanities became a disciplinary phenomenon, that is, from the early nineteenth century onward, the circulation of cultural material characterized by a professional or disciplinary formation may have had a greater impact than its “dilettantish” variant, in particular because it was at that point not only content that was to be transported, but also methodological, that is, more readily transferable parameters.

5.—*Mutatis mutandis*, many of the above points also apply to a religious tradition (specifically to the question of its dissemination) which lies outside the temporal and topographical frame of this study, but which should be addressed at least in passing: Buddhism originated in India around the fifth century BCE. For whatever reason, it started proselytizing beyond the borders of its region of origin only in the first century CE; there were efforts to make Buddhist teachings known in regions located westward of India, but the only transculturation with a significant, long-lasting impact took place between India and East Asia (China, Korea, and Japan).²⁵⁹ As their Christian analogues would do in early

259 It would seem that the most important publication on the topic is still Erik Zürcher’s book (now nearly fifty years old) *The Buddhist Conquest of China: The Spread and Adaptation of Buddhism in Early Medieval China*, Leiden 2007 (3rd print); for the reasons mentioned above, I have slight reservations concerning the term “conquest” in this context.

modern times, Buddhist monks of the period mentioned made use of a network infrastructure which had been established for economic reasons: the Silk Road.

It is a question that shall not be discussed here why a highly developed culture with a sophisticated philosophical and ethical tradition of its own, namely China, was receptive to the penetration of an “alien” cult; but it should be mentioned that this fact marks a difference from the spread of the Christian religion to foreign regions, at least in the period under consideration in this book. The Christian missionaries travelling west- or eastward starting at the end of the fifteenth century followed the paths established previously by the conquests of military men. Consequently, it is not astonishing that the indigenous cultural communities received the material the missionaries transferred to these territories. In the state of having been (physically) conquered, they did not have the alternative of rejecting it. The penetration of Buddhism into China was, by contrast, mainly peaceful; this aspect notwithstanding, it was highly successful. One possible explanation of this difference might be the fact that China was in a period of internal difficulties, if not turmoil at that time. It may be that a cultural community is more receptive to “imported” cultural patterns in cases where the “autochthonous” ones seem no longer to be effective.

As is the case with Christianity, the original cult underwent some changes in the course of the process of transculturation; but the more important point from this book’s perspective is the fact that the eastward migration of Buddhism was accompanied by cultural patterns it had adopted previously and which were related only metonymically to the cult proper. These patterns thus were able to acquire a status of their own, that is, as cultural forms that were fit for use outside of cultic practices in the strict sense. Art historians hold that the drapery patterns typical of Buddha statues were inspired by Greek cultural material, namely, the representation of female goddesses, which might have been brought to India and China by Buddhist monks who had tried to proselytize westward. Later on, when Chinese emperors began to legitimize their power emblematically by stylizing their visual representations in a Buddha-like fashion, these “Greek” drapery patterns, applied to statues of the emperors, became a feature of the Far Eastern language of symbolic secular power.— Moreover, it is striking that many Buddhist *stupas* exhibit structures which seem to be inspired by the post-basilica architecture of the Christian Churches, or vice versa.

It would be possible to multiply the examples, but, as already mentioned, this is not the ambition of the present study. In addition to this brief demonstration of the fact that it is not only the Christian denominations which assumed the role of conscious agencies of transculturation, I should like to stress a major

difference between the Buddhist and the Christian deployments of their basic parameters beyond their respective regions of origin. This difference—the absence, in the case of Buddhism, of an attempt at reorganizing entire societies (political systems; social norms; education systems; economic systems) according to parameters initially inspired by doctrinal positions—would seem to be contingent on the different doctrinal cores of the two belief systems in question. On behalf of its central doctrine, the incarnation of the Godhead, Christianity is a religion focusing at the same time on the beyond and on the material, physical world. From the perspective of Buddhism, the material world has to be overcome. The ethical norm taught by the priests and monks does not consist in the imperative to reorganize the world so as to acquire the dignity to be saved, but rather in the imperative to endure the world as it is while preserving certain ethical norms, thus “earning” a future incarnation on a higher level of spirituality.

6.—At this point, it seems appropriate to highlight an important agency of transculturation which is constituted by religious identification, but which finally differs in structure from the universalistic communities already addressed. I am referring to the Jewish population of the period.²⁶⁰ It was the fate of this community to live under diasporic conditions. Seen from an exterior perspective, the combination of a strongly particularistic self-description, that is, cohesion, and enforced de-autochthonization led to a situation which rendered European Jewry a very powerful instrument of transnational cultural exchange. Such dire events as prosecution and expulsion (English Jewry after 1290, French Jewry after 1306, the Rhineland Jews in the course of the crusades, and Spanish Jewry after 1492) may have had the remarkable long-term effect of a continuous cultural circulation unconstrained by national borders. It was only the emancipation of Jewish people from their status as second-class citizens and their ensuing assimilation into the various national cultures of Europe which may have reduced—though not annihilated—their role as active, if unintentional agents of transnational cultural transmission.²⁶¹

260 Relevant information may be gathered from David B. Ruderman, *Early Modern Jewry: A New Cultural History*, Princeton, NJ 2010.

261 —a process that was in a way inverted by the rejection of people of Jewish origin by Nazi Germany, which forced them into a kind of renewed tribalism. The survivors of the Holocaust are much less committed to the “national” cultures of their (European) countries of residence than, say, French or German Jewish people before 1933, who in many cases conceived of themselves as “patriots”, that is, as citizens not only legally, but also emotionally committed to their countries. For reasons differing from the situation in the era before the emancipation, in the present-day post-Shoah world, Jewish people continue to be active human agents of cultural exchange. Their commitment to the cultures of their respective countries of citizenship is less “deeply rooted” than it was in the period extending from the emancipation through the

The above paragraph provides an opportunity to open a parenthesis in order to briefly discuss the intricate question of “negative” variants of mobility (in the sense of migration), including cultural mobility. As problematic or sad as such mobility may have been for the humans involved, from the perspective of cultural history one must say that in very many cases even forced displacement has far-reaching and highly productive repercussions on cultural history. One very important further example from European history is the transmission of classical Greek philosophy, namely Aristotle’s work, from the Eastern Mediterranean to the Christian West, which occurred concomitantly to the Muslim conquest of North Africa and the Iberian Peninsula, events which were certainly no less bellicose than the activities of present-day jihadists. The pattern of cultural transmission originating from violent expulsion is represented by the events which occurred at the end of this chapter of Mediterranean religious history. The year of the definitive Christian *reconquista* of the peninsula (1492) was also the year in which internal religious homogenization was achieved by forcing Spanish Jews to leave the country. In their flight to places like Antwerp, Amsterdam, Bordeaux, Salonica, and Hamburg, they took with them the entire cultural material available in peninsular Spain, including the material brought there by the Muslim conquerors several centuries before.

Is cultural circulation always a “good thing”? Our spontaneous narcissism as permanently travelling intellectuals of the twenty-first century might lead to such a rather naïve assumption. Subjugated or colonized communities might consider such processes differently. But it may be that the descendants of the colonized consider—after many generations—the process of cultural transfer accompanying events as violent as war and subjugation to be something ultimately positive, an evolution that has brought the achievements of modernity to their communities. Basically, the question raised above cannot be answered, at least not within a scholarly framework. It may be that a world populated by small, self-sufficient, isolated communities (a Rousseauian structure), a world without a comprehensive cultural net is an idyll; but it may also be the case that such a world would be considered a prison or even an earthly variant of hell were it to exist. Was the circulation of Greco-Roman and Christian culture from the Mediterranean to Northern Europe—a circulation mediated by war and conquest—a good thing? Or would present-day Europeans have a more

first decades of the twentieth century. At the same time, their commitment to their ancestors’ faith has become—as is the case for Christian Westerners as well—somewhat less intense. These two parameters yield an intellectual mobility which might be higher than in the case of people with other cultural backgrounds.

felicitous life if they went on praying to Odin and Woden and living in the woods?²⁶² The net is a fact, as is progress. The ambition of this book is descriptive; evaluation of the process is left to readers.

7.—In addition to certain religious communities,²⁶³ there are a number of further transnational cultural agencies to be mentioned. These agencies display a much larger ideological flexibility than the Church(es), a fact which may, at first sight, seem to entail that they are more important producers of transnational dissemination than the latter; however, their actual impact is limited by the fact that they are, in contrast to the Christian Church(es) and to the other universalistic religious communities mentioned (Islamic, Buddhist), elitist in their self-description and as regards their interactions with societies at large.

One such agency that has been referred to above on various occasions is the upper strata of the ruling class, the European higher nobility, for whom nationality did not count as a feature of self-description. If it was politically opportune, members of this social caste were ready to migrate to any part of the “civilized” world²⁶⁴ as spouses of kings or queens, or as heirs to thrones for which there was no legitimate or acceptable succession to be found within the kingdom in question. I should like to adduce some particularly important cases besides the ones already mentioned (the two Italian Medici ladies who became

262 For a more detailed discussion of this intricate question, see my “Some Remarks on World Literature”, in: Küpper (ed.), *Approaches to World Literature*, pp. 167–175.

263 I shall not reproduce at this point the story of the cultural by-products of the expansion of Islam, consisting first of all in the transfer of Aristotelianism to the Iberian peninsula, that is, to a Christian Europe that at that time was in partial ignorance of its own intellectual origins; the story is referred to on various occasions above and below; but, above all, in an age of a renewed Western politics of appeasement with respect to a militant opponent, it has become—in an idealized variant abstracting from the bellicose context—one of the centerpieces, propagated again and again by the media, of present-day *doxa*.

264 Need I mention that this indifference towards “national” belonging was counterbalanced to a significant extent by the aforesaid *specific* universalistic (that is, Christian) frame within which these migration processes took place? That is the reason why I qualify the “ready-to-migrate” higher nobility as European.—There is not much information available about the marriage practices of non-European dynasties. One reason might be that monogamy, if it existed at all beyond Europe, was not practiced with the same rigor as under the rule of Christian morals. I do not know of any Chinese emperors who proposed to Japanese or Indian princesses, or vice versa; and if such exogamy occurred, it was an exception (as in the case of Alexander the Great’s marriage to a “barbarian” princess, Roxane, which was a scandal for his Greek compatriots). Even if such constellations might have arisen, what I am dealing with above is something else: transnational migration was a regular pattern of behavior among the ruling class of Europe which we can trace back to around the year 1000 CE and which disappeared only, step by step, with the shift of power from the aristocracy to the bourgeoisie.

queens of France, the German princess who became tsarina). In the period concerned, Spain was governed by a German dynasty, the Habsburgs, whose members became “romanized” and then created a “Latin” variant of Teutonic culture, still existing today, and still differing from standard German culture, namely, the culture of Austria. The last queen of pre-revolutionary France, Marie Antoinette, was a Habsburg princess, as well as King Louis XIV’s mother, Anne. At the end of the period in question, the British invited a German prince from the House of Hanover to become their king. Henry VIII’s first wife, Catherine, was of Spanish origin (etc., etc.). The ruling class in the age of feudalism and absolutism was “transnational” to a high degree, a feature that stands in almost diametrical opposition to the period starting with the French Revolution.

Regardless of their non-tribal self-description, all these “migrating” princesses and princes were of course deeply marked by the specific cultures of the countries where they had been born. Without even problematizing this fact—without thinking or talking about “hybridity” or “internationalization”—they took their cultures of origin with them, as part of their mental baggage, when leaving their homelands, and “unpacked” them in the places where they then settled down. Much cultural exchange in the early modern period was brought about by this transnational ruling class. One has to take into account, however, that this form of circulation primarily involved those features and artifacts appealing to the social elite. On the other hand, a ruling class is able to maintain its position only if it develops effective techniques for controlling the common people. One should therefore refrain from excluding the possibility that techniques for exercising power which made use of culture at large—that is, cultural artifacts targeting a non-elite audience—circulated as well by means of migrating members of this ruling class.

8.—A further agent of transculturation which needs to be mentioned is the community of scholars. In the age under scrutiny, their language was not the vernaculars, but Latin. The institutions of higher education—mainly universities, but colleges as well—displayed a homogeneity of organization that far surpasses what we have attained today in our age of globalization. The biographies of famous humanists, scientists, and artists of the period in question display a transnationality which is at times striking. Being a student in Bologna, then accepting a position in Paris or Oxford only to end one’s life as a professor in Prague or Heidelberg was not at all unusual. The main reason for this and comparable constellations is, of course, the fact that science is universal in its self-understanding; but the humanistic disciplines also conceived of themselves in such a way in that age. The *studia humanitatis* were not con-

cerned with contemporary phenomena; the study of literary texts written in the various vernaculars attained the status of university discipline(s) only in the first half of the nineteenth century. Early modern humanities studies were directed at the patrimony shared by all European nations: the two classical languages, Christian theology, and Greek philosophy. There was no reason in that age to think about the creation of a British or a French style of studying the humanities. There was no difference, neither with regard to the material studied nor with regard to the devices by means of which it was studied. As mentioned, this homogeneity was facilitated by the existence of an academic *lingua franca*.—The vehicular effects produced by the migrating academics were more limited than those produced by the Roman Church, for the same reasons as in the case of the nobility. This limitation was counterbalanced by the fact that those living in the ivory tower were the educators of the younger generation—that is, not of the entire younger generation, but of all those who later on in their lives would have an influence on cultural production. So, even though the recipients of what they transported in their “mental valise” were restricted in terms of numbers, the role of academics as active instruments of the circulation of cultural material should not be underestimated.—*Mutatis mutandis*, this quantitative remark holds true for the nobility as well.²⁶⁵

9.—As to literary culture in particular, one further agency dedicated to the task of “making material circulate in the net” which is of particular importance in the early modern age is the academy. These institutions first arose in *cinquecento* Italy as imitations of the classical Greek academies run by Plato and Aristotle—of which contemporary learned Italians had a rather vague idea. In Renaissance Italy, the academies’ primary task was to encourage their members to produce literary texts by way of drawing on the material floating in the cultural net, to discuss the drafts, and then to improve the texts before they were committed to general circulation, that is, to print. The academies provided an institutionalized infrastructure for cultural production.—It is interesting to note that it was not only the output of these institutions which circulated, but also the abstract idea underlying them. Roughly seven decades later than in Italy, one may observe the sudden flourishing of a number of academies in Spain—a country closely linked to Italy, or to parts of Italy, in the way illustrated above—followed by the establishment of the most famous academy of all

²⁶⁵ As previously mentioned, a single princess from abroad who succeeds at ascending the throne, as in the case of Catherine the Great, has the power to change the cultural map of her host country in a most dramatic and lasting manner.

times to date, the *Académie française* (1635).²⁶⁶ It will not be necessary to demonstrate the influence the French academy had on the country's cultural production.—Looking at the French case, it becomes immediately evident that these academies served both as sites of a particularly intense and systematic circulation and re-synthesis of cultural material, and as instances of control with regard to various aspects of their output—aspects which are, however, intimately intertwined: the aesthetic, the moral, and the political.

Academies are differentiated from the other agencies mentioned in that their role as institutionalized sites of intense production based on exchange, transfer, and re-circulation can hardly be overestimated. From the age of the academies onward, cultural production—at least in Europe—transitions from a pattern of patronage-driven artistic output to a more and more market-based system of production.²⁶⁷ In terms of both the quantity and the quality of the output of the net, the invention of these institutionalized systems marks a threshold, at least with regard to the era under consideration.—In the ages of Romanticism and post-Romanticism, the traditional academies lost their influence, since they were seen as conservative bastions defending the authority of outmoded traditions, rather than as places encouraging ingenuity. But the abstract concept of institutionalized infrastructures for cultural circulation and production subsists. Such institutions have taken on a more flexible shape, which at times may veil the fact that they are institutions, that is, restricted circles of humans collaborating according to rather well-defined rules, and with clear-cut goals and purposes. I am thinking of literary or cultural festivals and of the elaborate system of attribution of prizes and awards.

It remains a separate question (which shall not be discussed here in detail) what the consequences of the remodeling of the “original” Italian version of the institution under Spanish and French auspices may have been.²⁶⁸ To illus-

266 See the studies by Gvozdeva (*Compagnie d'hommes joyeux*) and Bung (“Playful Institutions”).

267 From the perspective of the French case only, this assessment might at first sight seem astonishing; most evidently, the monarch was the ideological “head” of the *Académie française* and, as such, its patron. In the cases of Italy, France, England, and Germany, things were different. But the main point I am making above concerns the quantity of cultural production, an aspect which applies in all countries mentioned: the establishment of institutions dedicated to cultural production created a sort of cultural “industry”. Combined with the generalization of print and the continuous growth of literacy, this quantitative expansion led to the emergence of what became the new literary “market”, by the latest in the second half of the eighteenth century.

268 These and many other relevant questions are discussed in the two studies just mentioned (n. 266).

trate the point in question with one sentence: it may be that the highly centralized French variant—one academy only, controlled by the king and his powerful prime minister—which differs dramatically from the polycentric Italian pattern as well as from the even more “fluid” shape the concept assumed in Spain, is one important reason for the fact that there is a rather clear-cut idea of what early modern French literary culture is, whereas in the case of Italy, and even more so of Spain (as well as Germany),²⁶⁹ there is no such emblematic concept which would make it conceivable to encapsulate the entire cultural production of the country in question.

10.—Finally, one has to mention agencies of transmission that systematically help circulate cultural material, but in a completely unintentional way. For the period under scrutiny, the British East India Company is perhaps the best-known example. Its activities consisted in economic exploitation based on previous physical conquest and political subjugation. Without any conscious intention to do so, the Company helped ramify the Western, in particular the British sub-net into South Asia, thus initiating massive processes of bidirectional circulation of cultural material which completely changed traditional South Asian societies, and partly transformed Western societies as well in the process.

One example of such an agency of parasitic cultural transmission which was, in contrast to the East India Company, mainly if not totally free from attempts at spreading political power was the *Deutsche Hanse* or Hanseatic League. The organization known under this name was an alliance of for the most part German cities (the biggest one was Hamburg, which styles itself even today as *Freie und Hanse-Stadt Hamburg*) whose economic activities were focused on trade. Almost all of the towns were harbor cities: Bremen, Lübeck, Greifswald, and Rostock, to name the most important ones after Hamburg. The net they constructed starting in the twelfth century is relevant to the problems here discussed insofar as it was intended to transcend the pattern of periodic short-term contact that typically accompanied commercial exchanges. The Hanseatic

269 Germany has many prestigious “regional” academies which have a long-standing tradition (The Bavarian Academy; The Heidelberg Academy; The Göttingen Academy). But it was only in the year 2008 that the oldest and, as to its members, most international of these regional academies, the Leopoldina, was elevated to the rank of German national academy. Much more than in the Latin countries, the German academies focus in their activities on scholarship, scientific as well as humanistic; for the fine arts, there are separate institutions (*Akademie[n] der schönen Künste*). From the perspective of a comprehensive understanding of culture, however, the role of the German academies is comparable to the function of their analogues in other Western countries.

League established small colonies of German traders all over Northern and Eastern Europe, as far north as Novgorod. These traders sought out manufactured goods which might be needed in their host cities. They notified their Hanseatic partners of their findings, welcomed the incoming ships sent out by the merchants of these cities, entertained their crews, and sold the goods the ships had transported to the locals, with whose language and habits they had familiarized themselves. Economically, the Hanseatic League was so successful that it created the basis for the fact that Hamburg remains to this day the wealthiest community in continental Europe.

The culturally relevant specificity of the “colonies” mentioned consists in the fact that they were governed by a legal status which has become obsolete in Europe since the era of the democratic revolutions, but which can be traced back to the times of ancient Greece. It was common in the European Middle Ages and in early modern times.²⁷⁰ This status might be best known under the term of “metic”, in its original spelling, *metoikos*: a person who has moved (*met-*) his household (*oikos*). The implication underlying the term is the archaic idea that one’s home should be located in one’s place of birth. Metics were the exception to this rule. They were permitted to reside in cities where they had not been born, as, for example, in the case of Spartans living in Athens. They were allowed to trade and to become trained craftsmen. But they were not granted citizenship, not even as second- or third-generation residents. They did not have “rights”, but only “privileges”, that is, unilaterally conceded guarantees that could be revoked at any time. They had to pay a heavy surtax. If they committed crimes against full citizens, they were severely punished; if full citizens perpetrated crimes against them, the consequences were not very grave. To put the matter in a nutshell: their situation was far from being idyllic. But it seems that they accepted it, whether by necessity—as the diasporic Jews had in Europe before the era of emancipation, when they lived under exactly this legal status; as Christians and Jews residing in territories conquered by Islamic powers did and in certain cases still do—or in view of an economic advantage to be gained. The important point in this context is that the status of metic implied that there was no pressure, nor even an invitation or an expectation, to assimilate to the autochthonous culture. In terms of cultural patterns, Spartan *metoikoi* stayed Spartan, German *Hanse* tradesmen stayed German,

270 It continues to exist in many Islamic countries even today, under the name of *dhimma*, and it regulates many uneducated Muslim immigrants’ minds in Europe—thus causing, together with the ignorance regarding this status on the part of Western mainstream public opinion, a totally misconceived debate on integration and assimilation.

pre-emancipation Jews stayed Jewish, etc. The necessity to interact with the locals, however, led these communities to develop the skills necessary for doing so. As a consequence, they were able to communicate in two different cultural frames, thus unintentionally becoming classical “cultural brokers”, or, in this book’s terminology, agents of cultural transmission.

The men of the *Hanse* in particular paved the way for a highly marked phenomenon: the strong affinity of Eastern Europe for all sorts of cultural items of German origin.²⁷¹ This still applies today. The atrocities committed by Germans during the Nazi era notwithstanding, German culture and language, as well as manufactured goods, have a greater importance and standing in post-Soviet Eastern Europe than in any other territory in the world, including Germany’s Western partners within the European Union.

11.—There is still a question as yet unanswered which transcends the geographical as well as the historical boundaries of this study: namely, whether or not there are comparable transnational agencies in other parts of the world at other times. In addition to what I have argued concerning Buddhism, I have only a few scattered remarks to make.—As already mentioned, universalistic ideologies, whether religious or secular, seem to be powerful agents promoting the transmission of cultural material. In addition to the Roman Church, one should consider under this heading the role of the *umma*, the community of those who pray to Allah. One may observe its activities as an agency of cultural transfer in countries far removed from its territory of emergence, such as Indonesia or the nations of (sub-Saharan) West Africa. For reasons of disciplinary competence, however, I shall leave it at the above speculations pertaining to the cultural impact of the Christian and the Muslim religions from a comparative perspective. One relevant point that shall be discussed later on and in a different context is the nearly complete rejection of theatrical performances within traditional Islam. The kind of mass media that emerged in Europe in the age under consideration does not exist in traditional Islamic societies. In that sense, one may hypothesize that Islam as an agency of cultural transfer is primarily dedicated to faith and related religious practices, but that its contribution to the spread of more secular cultural practices and items is limited in comparison.²⁷²

271 Regarding the impact of diasporic Jewry on processes of cultural transfer, see above, pp. 123 f.

272 I shall take the liberty to remind nonspecialist readers of the fact that the Roman Church exported the Spanish religious drama (*auto sacramental*), or its analogues created by the Jesuits, to the “exotic” places mentioned above; as, in terms of form and structure, these post-Renaissance didactic plays were heavily influenced by humanistic, that is Aristotelian principles, this process paved the way for the subsequent reception of secular European drama and visual culture in those regions.

On the other hand, one cannot ignore the fact that the philosophical basis of post-classical antiquity was determined by the reception of an oeuvre which most probably would have remained unknown in the Occident at least until the Fall of Constantinople had the Muslim conquerors of North Africa and the Iberian Peninsula not transported it along with their weapons, implementing it in the conquered territories along with their faith, their mosques, etc. Military conquest that is driven by nothing but material greed²⁷³ might involve some cultural transmission as well, but typically is not associated with a systematic *translatio studii*²⁷⁴ as observable in cases of military conquest fueled by universalistic ideologies. Having said this, the fact must be stressed that, with respect to the question of Islam as an agency of secular cultural transmission, the Aristotelian corpus might be a singular case.²⁷⁵

As to secular universalism as a catalyst for cultural transmission, one would have to take into consideration the concept of “human rights” and the pretense of the political model of democracy to being a template of universal suitability. It might be superfluous to comment on the cultural side effects of modern ideologies committed to universalism, since we are able to take note of them every day when watching the news. There is no military endeavor of the West that is not followed by attempts at implementing in the conquered or “liberated” territories structures, rules, and narratives whose main or even sole task is to facilitate in future times the unrestricted circulation of cultural material from the Western metropolises to the regions (re-)integrated into the “universal” net.

12.—What about the present-day situation? The role of the Christian Churches in the transmission of cultural material has diminished dramatically, in proportion to their general loss of influence. The high aristocracy as a transnational

273 —as in the case of the Mongol tribes, starting in the thirteenth century under their leader Genghis Khan, who extended his power from Central Asia to the entire region subsequently known as the Ottoman Empire.

274 I invite readers to take, in this respect, a look at my description of the cultural scenario in colonial India, which might be a particularly intricate “intermediate” case (pp. 212–215).

275 —a point which raises many questions, indeed, but questions difficult to answer in a non-speculative way; even if it is true that the leading Arab Aristotelians were converted Jews, there is the question of why the religious authorities tolerated their activities. What is in my view the only tenable observation in this respect was already given expression to above: Islam does not need a concept analogous to original sin; on behalf of this feature, an unrestrictedly positive evaluation of abstract reason is, in principle, possible; things might become different the more the level of abstraction is lowered.—Although this will provoke an uproar of indignation amongst politically correct readers, I allow myself to express that I consider the many further items of Arab/Islamic culture transferred to Europe in the process of conquest which occurred in medieval times, mainly consisting of items of everyday culture, as being of minor importance.

ruling class has vanished.²⁷⁶ For the reasons mentioned above, the importance of Jewish people (or of people of Jewish origin) as agents of transmission may have decreased;²⁷⁷ but on the other hand, their reduced mobility as individuals might be compensated by the fact that the re-established Jewish nation state has become, on behalf of the prehistory of its members, a sort of laboratory of high-intensity cultural exchange, a universal cultural net *in parvo*. As to the transnational community of scholars and artists, it continues to be of great importance. But it shall remain an open question whether or not the age of “national cultures” inflicted a blow to this community’s transnationality from which it has not yet recovered.—In addition, there are agencies of transculturation emerging only in technological modernity proper. The most important one is the visual media industry (film, TV, nowadays the Internet), whose revolutionary activities began in the twentieth century. It may very well be the case that the shared rhetorical ideal which withered in the age of nationalism and national cultures has been superseded today by a transnational and trans-Western “rhetorical” system whose main mediatic basis is no longer language, but visually encoded patterns.²⁷⁸—Global capitalism is said to have reached its state of maturity in the last decades. But the capitalist model of economy has been a relevant factor, including in the sphere of culture and cultural goods or commodities, not only since the age of imperialism, that is the second half of the nineteenth century; its early stages may be traced back to antiquity. If, however, we take the epithet of “global” literally, it is, indeed, a phenomenon that does not emerge until the beginning of the twentieth century.

276 The concept of “dynastic bonds” beyond borders as an instrument of politics has evaporated concomitantly to the complete loss of effective power on the part of the “royals”. Present-day heirs to the throne typically marry women or men from their own country; in order to avoid frictions with their peers, they steer clear of the members of their country’s aristocracy. The status of these royals is that of common “celebrities”. In order to preserve it, they have to comply with the expectations and fantasies of the readers of the yellow press. For a girl or a young man working as a hairdresser, it is easier to fantasize about being a journalist or a fitness instructor from their own country than to fantasize about being some highbrow aristocrat from abroad.

277 But see also my deliberations concerning this point in n. 261.

278 This observation is not meant in a strictly dichotomous way; the actual performance of the speech on the rhetorician’s part, that is, visual encoding, has always been a component of rhetoric; and present-day global mass media do not rely on visual codes alone, but also make use of language, albeit in a way that is rather reduced from the standpoint of a person who has been educated before the “iconic turn”. The relative weight of linguistic and visual mediation seems to have been inverted. This said, the formal standardization (“rhetoricization”) of visual encoding in present-day globally distributed motion pictures seems to be, indeed, no less strict than the standardization of verbal patterns was in the age of rhetoric.

It is not only for reasons of remaining within the temporal frame of this book that I do not discuss these latter agencies in detail. I think that their activities, as far as cultural transfer is concerned, do not differ qualitatively from the activities of their predecessors (printing companies, medieval *scriptoria*, traders, associations of traders, trading companies). The difference is one of quantity, and we will have to look to the future to determine whether or not the exponential increase of cultural material distributed by a globalized economic system and via the Internet as its primary medium will bring about qualitative change as well, in the sense of transformations which can no longer be captured by the concepts regarding the past developed in this book.

Control and Demand

0.—As emphasized on various occasions, the processes of circulation taking place in the cultural net may in principle be conceived of as unrestricted. But when it comes to connecting the circulating material to “consumers”, whether individual or collective recipients, there are regulatory mechanisms which can be subdivided into more authoritarian and more “market-driven” variants. From a historical perspective, there is an asymmetry between these two parameters that needs to be pointed out. I believe, albeit somewhat speculatively, that “demand” is a regulatory mechanism which applies from the very first stages of the species’ existence up to the present: humans want to satisfy their “needs” and “desires”; these needs are to be understood, I may add parenthetically, to comprise both the “real” and the fantasized. In the domain of symbolic encoding, too, humans show a preference for making use of that symbolically encoded material that satisfies their needs better than other available material.²⁷⁹ Mechanisms of control, by contrast, might be a more historically specific phenomenon; they seem to be bound to the emergence of hierarchical struc-

²⁷⁹ As to underlying “real” needs, I refer once again to my above speculation concerning primordial hunting practices. As to the fulfillment of fantastic needs, one might wish to first discuss the question of when fantasizing emerged in the history of the species. I should like to hypothesize that this happened quite early on. The only difference between these primordial daydreamers and their modern descendants may be the fact that in those times happiness was understood in a way that we would characterize as naïve in our common narcissistic self-centeredness. In the early periods of humankind, it might have consisted in the state of having successfully slain a particularly big bull (which is, by the way, not all that different from happiness understood as the state of being a powerful knight or a rich man). As soon as humans succeeded in symbolizing (imagining) an animal of prey which was not actually present, there was already a basic structure enabling what was in later times called “fantasizing”.

tures, to the evolution leading from informally organized tribes to “societies” or even states. Only in case there are certain individuals within a community who are able to deploy physical power sufficient to coerce their fellows into doing what they do not want to do, or into not doing what they wish to do, is there the possibility of exerting control of any kind; this includes control over access to and use of cultural material floating in the net. If we are inclined to believe the Rousseauian narrative, this condition became fulfilled when sedentary life and the concept of private property set in. But I would speculate that hierarchical structures are much older. As soon as there were people who were responsible for making decisions, or for negotiating with “higher beings” (spirits, gods), it is more than probable that these individuals or small groups of individuals tried to stabilize and preserve their position by controlling the “thinking” of the other members of the tribe. This is most effectively done by controlling symbolically encoded fantasizing.

1.—Although there are significant indicators of a systematic control of cultural material circulating in the net during quite early phases of human history—possibly the most prominent being the eradication of all symbols of the first monotheism after Akhenaten’s (Amenophis IV’s) death²⁸⁰—it should be stressed that the institutionalized variant of control is ultimately an invention of early modern times and has not evolved very much since then. It is indeed remarkable, and should soothe some of the hysteria prevailing in the Western public sphere at the time when this chapter was written (2014), to observe that the control mechanisms to which the information floating in the present-day Internet is subjected seem to be largely identical to the devices developed by the Inquisition in the period under scrutiny in this book. There is nothing novel about them, and nightmares of an emerging Orwellian society seem much more based on media-

280 Without being a Hegelian in the strict sense, the episode mentioned above gives me the occasion to express, once again, an idea already developed above: if a specific cultural material has a certain appeal for reasonable beings (as, in this example, the concept that there is only one god instead of the wild circus of hybrid beings to whom Egyptians prayed until that time), it is difficult to eradicate it once and for all. In this case, it was adopted by a frustrated prince building on Akhenaten’s religious heritage in order to ideologically homogenize a number of slaves who were tired of building pyramids, to promise them a bright future, and to make them endure hardships close to unimaginable from a modern perspective. As a highly mediated result of what was achieved by Moses by overriding the traditional priests’ activities of controlling access to the concept of the one and only God already floating in the net, there emerges, according to Hegel, the stage of what we call modernity in human history. It would be highly futile, but nevertheless interesting, to speculate on whether or not there may have been a more direct path towards modernity had Akhenaten’s ideas remained dominant in the most powerful empire of that age after his death.

induced sensationalism²⁸¹ than on facts. When, in the year 2013, the “whistle-blower” Edward Snowden revealed that agencies like the NSA were overseeing all communication taking place on the Internet, the (continental) public was not informed that this control was exercised by first searching for certain terms (“terror”, “Islam”, “jihad”, etc.), then for concatenations of these terms, and finally by asking for the frequency of concatenations of such terms within a given message, in order to identify the very few messages which were then submitted to a qualified human agent for the purposes of a more penetrating scrutiny of the underlying intentions. The main difference between this practice and the work once done by the Inquisition is the fact that the initial search processes were performed by humans rather than machines in former times, and that the items targeted were different ones (references to Lady Fortune; all terms related to sexual activities conceived of as a source of pleasure; free will or rather its denial, etc.).²⁸² The structure itself continues to be identical to what it has been from the late Middle Ages onward.

With regard to the early modern period and also to modern totalitarian societies, one would have to add that such control—by the Inquisition or by secular offices of censorship—works in two different directions. In terms of the mere quantity of interventions, the mechanisms of control mostly exert pressure on what is extracted from the net. They prohibit certain pieces from being performed and certain books from being distributed. But they also try to prevent problematic material from entering the net. The main device employed to this end is the necessity imposed on authors to obtain an *imprimatur*, an official license to publish the text in question before the printing process can start. Historical evidence, however, demonstrates that neither measure is able to totally prevent cultural material from going viral, thanks to the circulatory processes in which all such material is involved. The inferior approach, in terms of effectiveness, seems to be the measures taken in order to prevent texts from entering the net.

281 It is not my intention to criticize the media with the above formulation. News has to sell, otherwise the companies broadcasting it could not survive. Readers or viewers would stop paying for news if these companies admitted on nine out of ten days that nothing worth reporting had happened on the previous day. As a consequence of this situation, the press, as well as electronic media, have recourse to the devices of scandalization and emotionalization in order to attract readers and viewers, that is, people who are in principle supposed to be ready to pay for their products. But media recipients should be able to differentiate between facts on the one hand and devices serving to make facts interesting to them on the other.

282 As to the processes of censorship executed by the Inquisition, see Waltraud Summer-Schindler, *Zensur und Involution*. Aspekte gegenreformatorischer Überformung der italienischen Renaissance-Novelle, Maastricht and Herzogenrath 1996.

Over the centuries, authors have produced a wide range of methods to evade attempts to control input to the net. The most elementary device is to “smuggle” a manuscript to a region out of the reach of the control agency in question. In the age of the Counter-Reformation, it was common practice to send manuscripts assumed by their authors to be problematic from Spain to the Netherlands, have them printed there, and smuggle copies back into Spain. At times, it was even sufficient to have the manuscript clandestinely printed in the country itself and to give a fake place of print (e.g., Anveres/Antwerp in the case of one of the first print editions of the *Lazarillo de Tormes* [1554]). Similar techniques were frequently made use of in later times, for example during the period of the Iron Curtain, and especially in countries located at the Western frontier of the Eastern Bloc, such as East Germany and Czechoslovakia. In the Soviet Union, where contacts between locals and foreigners were more scarce, clandestine techniques of reduplication—typewriting, mimeographing, etc.—were used to evade the censors via underground networks (*samizdat*).

Even when the harshest conceivable measures were taken—e.g., the burning of prohibited books or of their authors—the cultural material in question could rarely be entirely suppressed. Acts of cultural repression are almost always public, or are rather staged by the authorities as public events, with the intention of intimidating the public in order to discourage the reception of banned material. But it is precisely this constellation which makes such *autos da fé* into material for narration and re-narration, and which inspires curiosity about the proscribed publications, thereby providing the basis for a revival or reception of the works in question in later, more tolerant times. Even if—as may have happened in periods before the age of print—a given text existing only in the form of a unique manuscript is irrevocably destroyed, it is probable that its conceptual substrate, at whatever level of abstraction, survives and becomes part of the material circulating in the net.

Mechanisms of control also include variants that are less authoritarian than the ones thematized in the last paragraph. In many cases, they take the shape of a negotiation between control agencies and producers of culture. In the period under scrutiny, the Inquisition frequently granted the necessary *imprimatur* under the condition that the submitted first version be reworked and “purged” of all controversial content. Analogous mechanisms were developed by contemporary secular control agencies such as the *Académie française*, which supervised the political orthodoxy even of texts by renowned authors like Corneille and requested revisions in case they were considered necessary. The trials that Baudelaire and Flaubert had to stand for having published, respectively, *Les Fleurs du mal* (1857) and *Madame Bovary* (1857) may have been the last great

cases of authoritarian control of the material admitted to the net to have taken place in modern Western European societies; the “crime” both authors were accused of was to have intentionally weakened “good morals”.²⁸³ Still, there are traces left of such mechanisms in present-day Western societies; they do not affect the strands of cultural production targeted in this book.²⁸⁴ In comparison to previous periods of cultural history, present-day Western cultural production seems to be free to extract any material from the net and to commit it, after reworking it into a new artifact, to further circulation, to an extent that is at times shocking for people from a different background. My country is a particularly extreme case, even within the liberal culture of present-day Europe. As is well known, obscenities of the most radical kind have been admitted on German stages, in particular in Berlin, since the 1970s without any restrictions; in reaction to the massive control of the cultural net during the Nazi era, and also in the communist GDR, German culture today profits from a close to unrestricted freedom of access to and use of the material circulating in the cultural net.

Viewed from the perspective outlined above, one may feel tempted to hypothesize that pervasive authoritarian control of the material that enters and is withdrawn from the net is an exception in the long history of human culture. Indeed, it calls for effective bureaucratic control agencies on the one hand and the general acceptance of authoritarian control on the other. So it may be that its historical incidence is linked to the (early modern) sovereign state and its degenerate totalitarian variants.

2.—I will now proceed to suggest what a demand-driven cultural production might look like; these remarks will help to balance the impression that regulatory mechanisms which have an impact on the material floating in the net have simply evolved from “evil” to “good”; on the other hand, I would not deny that I prefer a regulation based on informal mechanisms to one based on bureaucratized control.

This second regulatory mechanism to be considered takes on a shape familiar from market dynamics. But—if one temporarily brackets the question of fiction

283 In the case of *Madame Bovary*, it was Emma’s adultery, not criticized by the (absent) narrator, that was targeted by the public prosecutor. Flaubert was acquitted, but it seems that he had to make use of his close relations to the imperial court in order to evade being sentenced. Baudelaire was less fortunate. He had to produce a “purged” version of his collection of poems; the “*pièces condamnées*” are characterized by references to sexual practices which fell under the heading of *contra naturam* in former times.

284 I am in particular thinking of the very intense debate, conducted in recent years mainly in Germany, Ireland, and Britain, revolving around the abuse of children and the electronic circulation of recordings of such practices.

in the very strict sense, for whose demand-side profile Freud's essay on fiction and daydreaming, frequently quoted by me, yields a satisfactory answer—what is demand in this context? I should like to come back to a historical constellation already briefly addressed above, in order to scrutinize more closely the motives of a given cultural community to extract specific material circulating in the net although the material which is concomitantly neglected might be philosophically and aesthetically just as interesting as, or even more interesting than this material.

As explained to some extent in the context of my brief comparative remarks concerning *Hamlet* and *La vida es sueño*, skepticism was the dominant epistemological and philosophical school in early modern Europe. It had attained this status within a few decades following upon its “rediscovery” in the middle of the sixteenth century. What was it that led preeminent contemporary philosophers to consign traditional Aristotelian, that is, sense-based scholastic epistemology to further travel in the net and to extract, by way of translating Sextus Empiricus' *Pyrrhoneion hypothyposeon libri tres* (second century CE), skepticism from the net, where it had been floating as mostly inactive cultural material for some 1,500 years? According to my findings, there are two main determining factors which motivated contemporary human agents to make use of their freedom of choice in the way they did. Firstly, the geographical discoveries of the age—a mental shock for early modern Europeans whose impact we are hardly able to imagine—had completely destabilized the current assumption that humans may distill from their sensory perception a “true” picture of the world.²⁸⁵ Our senses convey to us that the earth is a kind of disc; at the latest from Magellan's voyage onward, it was evident that this assumption is untenable. Even today, our senses convey to us that the sun rotates around the earth; but since the time of Galileo's observations, it is clear that this is not true. In this situation, early modern European epistemology took recourse to a cultural configuration at hand in the net by way of which it was possible to theorize the findings for which there was no explanation within the old paradigm, namely, skepticism.—It should be added that the process of appropriation and reactivation which thus occurred is quite typical of such “demand-induced” extractions. In cases where the demand is urgent, there is a tendency to have recourse to a cultural configuration which provides a fundamental, even a radical answer to the question irresolvable under the old paradigm. Radicalness, however, always goes along with exaggeration. This, in consequence, leads to the fact that the material enthusiastically extracted from the net is

²⁸⁵ See my “The Traditional Cosmos and the New World”.

recommitted at least to a large extent to its further travel after a relatively short period. In the case under consideration, this indeed happened with Descartes's rationalistic rejection of skepticism and with Bacon's integration of some of skepticism's assumptions into a new and revolutionary synthesis of sense-based and sense-skeptical epistemology known under the name of empiricism.

The example thematized above seems to contain a second point to be considered in similar cases. Pyrrhonian skepticism was literally resurrected in the year 1562, when the first translation into Latin appeared in print. Contrary to other classical texts re-extracted from the net in the course of the Renaissance, the radical skeptics' theses had been truly unknown in the Middle Ages, because the only language in which they had been transmitted—Greek—was not studied in that period. Nevertheless, the aforementioned sudden reactivation took place on a discursive territory which was in a way prepared for it, and thus ready to receive a theory whose conceptual profile was only vaguely known until then. Occamism, in particular theological nominalism, had postulated as early as at the beginning of the fourteenth century that an Almighty God is not obliged to manifest Himself eternally in a manner consistent with what He had revealed in Scripture. He is free to change His will. He does not owe humankind anything (“[Deus] ad nihil faciendum obligatur. [Deus] autem nulli tenetur nec obligatur tanquam debitor.” / “There is nothing that God is obliged to do. He is bound to no one nor obliged to anyone as a debtor.”).²⁸⁶ He is even, as was held by Occam's aforementioned thirteenth-century precursor in Paris, free to create “several different worlds” (“plures mundos facere”).²⁸⁷ This nominalistic theology, which was for two centuries the antagonist of Thomist, Aristotelian thinking, and which later became the basis for Protestantism, is certainly not identical with skepticism. But the epistemologies deriving from the respective edifices of thought are compatible to a very high degree. If God is indeed the sole master of His volition, He is free to manipulate humans' sensory perception, whether totally or merely occasionally; and (this may be even more important) He is free to add new components to his Creation so that all knowledge based on former sense perception is instantaneously devalued. These were most propitious conditions for the rapid spread of the thoughts contained in Sextus' book, whose extraction from the net might have remained a negligible episode of cultural history had the conditions been less favorable. But the pri-

286 William Occam, *Opera Philosophica et Theologica. Quaestiones in librum secundum sententiarum*, Gedeon Gál and Rega Wood (eds.), New York, NY 1981, qu. 3–4 and qu. 15.

287 See n. 34 of the 219 propositions condemned as “Averroist” in the famous decree of 1277 by the Parisian bishop Etienne Tempier (*Chartularium universitatis parisiensis*, vol. 1, pp. 543–558).

mary factor was that there was, indeed, a strong “demand”. There was an epistemological “void” waiting to be filled, and the theories summarized by Sextus exactly fit to fill that void, or rather to temporarily veil its existence and thus to palliate the *horror vacui* that accompanies inexplicability.

It remains to be discussed how this demand should be further defined when it comes to cultural artifacts in the modern sense as theorized by Kant, that is, autonomous, de-pragmatized works of art, while relegating to the background for the time being Freud’s questioning of such an approach to artworks, or, rather, while assuming that there may be a sort of multilayered demand, a conscious, “Kantian” one and a subconscious, repressed, “Freudian” one. The “Kantian” demand to which these works constitute an answer is certainly not, as was the case above, pragmatic. What, however, could the profile of a merely aesthetic “demand” be? In the sphere of the pleasing but superfluous it would seem at first sight hard to imagine something like “need” and ensuing “demand”. As emphasized on several occasions, the period in which this question becomes pertinent lies beyond the scope of this book. For the time being, I should like to limit myself to the remark that the theories of Russian formalism seem to provide a largely sufficient answer to the question as far as the age of “Kantian” art is concerned: the demand satisfied by modern art proper is the longing for the “novel”, for new stimuli of our sensibility, which has been anaesthetized by automatization.

The absolute centrality of the ideologically understood criterion of demand for works of art from the period under scrutiny may perhaps be best observed with regard to the reception of Boccaccio’s *Griselda* story.²⁸⁸ The novella had a huge resonance all over Europe up to the end of the seventeenth century. It yielded the basis for a great variety of dramas in all major European languages, as well as in a number of minor ones, in particular in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. It continued to be popular, albeit to a lesser degree, up to the end of the nineteenth century. From that time onward, it seems to have become of merely historical interest in the sense that no more rewritings of the story emerged. The apogee of its reception was the first half of the seventeenth century; let me recall that it dates from the fourteenth. If one takes into consideration that the story revolves around the issue of marriage, primarily around the question of how to define the obligations that male and female partners have and of how they should treat each other, it is obvious that the demand motivat-

288 See above, n. 183, for a précis of the action narrated, and see Rüegg, *The ‘Patient Griselda’ Myth in Late Medieval and Early Modern Literature*, for the reception history summarized above.

ing the extraction of this story from the net was the renewed or perhaps even entirely new interest in the definition of marriage provoked by the theological discussions starting with the Reformation. The Protestant denominations agreed to deny marriage the status of a sacrament and instead cast it as a worldly institution, albeit one conceived by God in order to palliate humans' carnal desires by providing a frame within which they may be lived out in an "orderly" fashion. The interest in topics revolving around marriage was fueled by the Catholic Church's reaction, that is, by the dogmatization of marriage's sacramental character within the Council of Trent and the ensuing strict supervision of believers' sexual lives and of the way they performed as married couples.

3.—The Griselda story and its reception provides the opportunity to address a specific point, not discussed as yet, pertaining to the issue of demand as a driving force of cultural circulation processes. I have already mentioned the relevance of the existence of a *lingua franca* version for the smoothness of processes of circulation within the net. There is no way to conduct experiments in the field of history, but it appears at first sight to be a not at all negligible factor behind the immense propagation of the text that Petrarch, for whatever reason, translated the story created by his friend Boccaccio into Latin; on the other hand, I remain skeptical with regard to the systematic relevance of language when it comes to the integration of specific works into the floating processes taking place within the cultural net. In the case of the translation in question, however, one may observe a specific feature that may be of more general theoretical import. If one compares Petrarch's version to the original, it becomes evident that it displays a reduction of the original's semantic complexity. With regard to Boccaccio's version, one may rightly say that it is a totally enigmatic story. There is no question that the central personage, the *marchese*, is not presented as an exemplary token of what a husband is or should be. But Griselda's "patience", too, is difficult to accept as an instance of exemplarity. One should not forget that she truly believes that her children were killed by her husband and that she accepts these "facts" without revolting against the *marchese's* (as the narrator puts it) "matta bestialità". In the times of pagan Rome, her behavior might have been acceptable, since a *pater familias* was allowed to kill his offspring. But within a Christian framework, the killing of innocent children without reason jars with the dogma that every human being is endowed with a soul created by God. The story thus highlights the question—illustrated by the female protagonist—of whether or not marital duties should precede parental duties, as well as the question of what female human beings essentially are to be: is it their main task to care for their offspring, or rather to be the unrestrictedly loyal companions of males? The only plausible interpretation of Boccaccio's version I see is to understand it as a final crystalization—it is, indeed, the last novella of the

Decameron—of the quasi-epistemological essence of the collection as a whole. While there is an implicit problematization of the novellas' didactic character in the previous ninety-nine stories, or rather in their relation to one another, the last novella renders this central message explicit: namely, that the *strani casi* (the strange, singular cases) of which the “world” presented in the stories is comprised do not allow for the extraction of any lesson regarding the essence of reality—that is, with the exception of the (nominalistic) meta-essence that there is no such (primary) essence.²⁸⁹

It is as early as in Petrarch's translation that this inextricable complexity becomes reduced with a view to creating a didactic story about the duties of a “good” wife. This semantic “primitivization” remains in place for the story's entire reception history. However, the result is not always a simplistic didacticism, in the sense of conveying a maxim by narrating a story. In very many cases, the attitude displayed by Griselda is made use of in order to trigger an intra-fictional discussion or even debate about the right way to behave within the institution of marriage. But nowhere in the later reception history is the “uncanny” character of Boccaccio's first (written) version preserved.—To put the point in more abstract terms: we have the tendency to consider processes of cultural transmission to be accompanied by an accumulation of complexity. This may, indeed, be a vector along which Western culture, considered in general terms, evolves, from its medieval beginnings up to the present day. But it may not apply to singular cultural phenomena or even to “works”. One should keep in mind that the reduction of semantic complexity (or, to put it in other terms, the popularization) of a given material floating in the net is a very important feature of cultural dynamics. The reduction may even lead, as is the case here with the transformation of an uncanny enigma into a tale of exemplarity, to a complete re-functionalization.

4.—Cultural history is a part of general history, not an idyllic realm sectioned off from what is otherwise mostly bloody, cruel, and inhumane. This insight encourages me to thematize, as a second illustrative example for my postulate of demand as a causal factor of extraction from the net, the darkest period of my own country's history, Nazism. One of the striking, even bizarre features of Nazi culture was the reactivation of pagan Germanic myth and of related ritualistic practices. If one considers the success of the Christian religion as an effect

289 For a more detailed account of this reading, see my “Affichierte Exemplarität, tatsächliche A-Systematik. Boccaccios *Decameron* und die Episteme der Renaissance”, in: Klaus W. Hempfer (ed.), *Renaissance. Diskursstrukturen und epistemologische Voraussetzungen. Literatur – Philosophie – Bildende Kunst*, Stuttgart 1993, pp. 47–93.

of its overriding of the many highly naïve features of former polytheisms, it seems difficult to understand why a majority of people from one of the most educated nations of the globe was ready, from a certain period onward, to almost avidly extract all this, intellectually considered, obsolete cultural material revolving around Odin and Woden, places like Valhalla, runes, and the swastika from the cultural net, where it had been hovering, mostly inactive, since the times of the Germanic territories' Christianization.

The demand, in this case, was according to my view located in a sphere nowadays called identity politics. During World War I, and starting already in the two previous decades,²⁹⁰ Germany had tried to obtain by military force what William II, the last emperor, called a *Platz an der Sonne*—it had attempted to become an equal player among the leading nations of Western Europe, whose political modernization and technological industrialization had taken place much earlier than in Germany. These attempts at becoming one of the world powers within the occidental system, indeed perhaps the dominant power in Europe, failed. As part of the Occident, Germany could have conceived of itself only as a minor, humiliated, defeated entity. This was the path forward suggested by the *Realpolitiker* of the Weimar Republic. The latter, however, did not take into consideration what Freud called humans' inextricable narcissism. The majority of German people then filled, so to speak, the gap with respect to a positive self-description by having recourse to the material, completely obsolete in terms of cultural history, characterized above. As was the case with skepticism, the material extracted from the net was of a very radical profile. Perhaps another parallel consists in the fact that its radicalness made the community that adopted it end up in an impasse after a relatively short period of time. And here, too, the cultural terrain was in a way prepared to receive the extracted material by previous cultural processes, namely, Romanticism and the second Romanticism commonly known as *décadence*, in this case: Wagnerism.

5.—The evolution of Russian drama and theater in the eighteenth century yields an example of a circulatory process induced by a strong demand which is, as in the previous case, political, but not immediately related to identity politics. The entire period of the country's history is characterized by political turmoil, by Tsars, Tsarinas, and heirs to the throne who are overthrown, reinstated only to be overthrown once again, and at times even killed. As demonstrated in detail in Kirill Ospovat's book,²⁹¹ this scenario created nearly ideal conditions for the reception of French and Shakespearean tragedy in a country

²⁹⁰ I here refer to Germany's belated politics of colonization.

²⁹¹ *Terror and Pity*.

which up to that period did not have an autochthonous tradition of tragic plays. The pieces by Shakespeare, Corneille, and Racine adapted to the Russian language and stage by Aleksandr P. Sumarokov served two very different purposes within the logic of a culture bound to absolutism. Firstly—and this trait may represent a coincidental link between the French and the Tsarist courts, or it may be another instance of importation—the stage was a very suitable means for reflecting on the theatricality of absolutist power, that is, its reliance on the courtiers' belief, conditioned by myriad performative elements on the part of the monarchy, that the monarch in power effectively controls the country, including nature.²⁹² Secondly, the *topos* of a reversal of fortune as is characteristic of all variants of tragedy (*peripeteia*) and particularly of the French classicist drama is a feature which re-enacts what “reality” was for the spectators (early Russian theater is intended almost exclusively for an aristocratic audience); presenting it on stage helped to create a frame for distanciation and subsequent reflection. In this context, it is quite telling that French classical comedy (Molière) was not received in Russia. The plots of certain well-known French tragedies, for example Racine's *Esther* (1689) and Corneille's *Nicomède* (1651), by contrast, were so close to what happened at the eighteenth-century Tsarist court²⁹³ that the reception of these pieces was conditioned by a sort of vacuum effect by which the exotic material was “drawn” to the East without any attempt by Western nations to exert an influence on the literary and cultural production of cities as remote as Moscow and St. Petersburg.

6.—I should like to conclude this chapter by referring to a particularly interesting section of Sven Kilian's contribution to the research which forms the basis of this book.²⁹⁴ While discussing Théodore de Bèze's *Abraham sacrificant* (1550), a play which is important because it is considered to be the first drama written in French according to neo-Aristotelian formal rules, Kilian notes that there are two questions that immediately emerge. One of these questions is: on what

292 One might thus consider the innumerable courtly festivities in Versailles or similar places, which displayed “miracles” of various kinds, as a sort of “staging” of the monarch's power over the elements; the park of Versailles may be a particularly instructive landscape variant of such a demonstration of royal power. It shows that even “nature” has to surrender to the monarch's aesthetic preferences.

293 The above qualification of some Racinian tragedies is to be understood with respect to the abstract pattern of the action. There is, of course, no “Jewish component” in Russian dynastic history, as there is in *Esther*; but there is the pattern of a ruler's wife who comes from a country that is foreign as to culture (language, religious denomination) and who is successful in preventing or countering several coups plotted against her.

294 “*Escrituras andantes*”.

grounds does the author claim his dramatization of the Akedah to be a tragedy (the subtitle is, indeed, “Tragédie Française”)? The second question pertains to the perplexing fact that there is a rich fund of mystery plays in the French tradition, but no play which deals particularly with this story,²⁹⁵ whose importance for the Jewish religion, for the unorthodox sect originating from it (Christianity), and for the history of religions in general is so obvious: the story marks the threshold between the ages during which the sacrifice of humans was an accepted practice and the more advanced periods of ritual history during which humans came to be replaced by animals in this respect.—I will start my observations by addressing this latter point, that is, the question of why the author may have extracted this story in particular from the material floating in the net. Bèze was a Protestant. He had to leave France when the persecution of the reformists began. He fled to Geneva, where he played a prominent role in the history of Swiss Calvinism, becoming the head of the Geneva Protestants after Calvin’s death. From a Protestant viewpoint, the story which occurred on the slopes of Mount Moriah is the first element in a chain of substitutions regarding sacrificial practices which culminates in the Calvinist understanding of the Eucharist. The second important element implied in this chain consists in the replacement of the sacrificial object, the ram or sheep, by the one to whom the sacrifice is offered, God-Christ, thus eliminating the “bargain” underlying the archaic pattern.²⁹⁶ As is evidenced by the paradoxical character informing this structure, the practice of sacrifice as such is abolished with the incarnated God’s self-sacrifice. For all future times, it is substituted by the act of remembering this last sacrifice, instituted by Jesus himself during the Last Supper.²⁹⁷ Catholicism, with its dogma of transubstantiation, that is, the claim that God’s self-sacrifice is repeated each time Mass is celebrated, is considered by Calvinism to be a relapse into patterns from pre-Christian times, when sacrifice was still necessary. By staging the first “step” of the entire story, and by stressing that it occurred on Yahweh’s own instructions (as is the case with the second step, according to the Christian narrative), Bèze is able to implicitly convey the

295 As we are dealing here with the Middle Ages, it cannot be systematically ruled out that there was one such (or even several such) play(s) in the period concerned; but since the documentation of cultural history is quite extensive in the case of France, there is a high probability that such plays, had there been any, would be mentioned in other texts even if themselves no longer extant.

296 One gives something of one’s own “voluntarily” while expecting something to be given back (good weather, rich crops, numerous progeny, long-lasting health).

297 “And he took bread, and gave thanks, and broke it, and gave unto them, saying, This is my body which is given for you: this do in my remembrance” (Luke 22: 19).

claim that Calvinism and its symbolic understanding of the Eucharist is the most cogent interpretation of Christian dogma as revealed in Scripture.

There may have been a second and more general motive for selecting this story instead of other dramatically attractive narratives (Judith, Saul and David, Absalom) when it came to considering biblical sequences suitable for shaping according to neo-Aristotelian rules.²⁹⁸ I have already mentioned the importance of the Akedah for the link between European self-conceptualization (as “civilized”, as “progressing”) and religious history. Bèze wrote his play at a time when the first chronicles on European contact with the tribal religions of the New World began to penetrate the consciousness of the West. Most of these reports were in Spanish, but some outstanding works existed in Latin translation,²⁹⁹ and it was actually a Frenchman, Montaigne, who disseminated an account of the Spanish conquest of the New World in his *Essais*.³⁰⁰ The mental shock of the encounter was no less massive on this side of the Atlantic than on the other. The huge problem it confronted Europeans with was the question of why there is not a single word to be found concerning these continents in Scripture, which at the time continued to be thought of as providing, by means of revelation, a literally true and definitive account of reality. I will not go into detail concerning the consequences the question provoked.³⁰¹ But it may be obvious that one primary reflex when it came to dealing with an “other” that was difficult to categorize within existing parameters was to deprecate the autochthonous tribes as less than human, as beast-like, and, for that reason, as not having merited mention in Scripture. In order to “prove” the barbaric, primitive character of the conquered peoples and tribes, nothing was more apt than the possibility of ascribing to them cultural practices which were, indeed, obsolete in the West. The most important point was the charge of human sacrifice and of cannibalism.—To put my speculation in a nutshell: the strong demand for extracting this particular element from the net and for disseminating it by means of the stage sprang from its demonstration of the fact that, thanks to Yahweh’s intervention, the West had abandoned human sacrifice, a practice still current amongst the tribes and nations of the New World. Bèze’s drama is

298 The standard stories at the basis of medieval mystery plays (the Creation and the Fall; Christmas; the Crucifixion and the Resurrection) were, indeed, less apt for such a formal shaping because they inevitably pertain not only to the specific time actually narrated, but ultimately to all of salvation history, at least according to the standard Christian (figural) interpretation.

299 E.g., José de Acosta, *Historia natural y moral de las Indias* (1590).

300 Comparing the texts, it appears to be most probable that Montaigne made use of Francisco López de Gomara’s *Primera y segunda parte de la historia general de las Indias* (1552).

301 See, once again, my “The Traditional Cosmos and the New World”.

one amongst many works intended to satisfy the European demand for indicators of the superiority of their culture in the Age of Discovery.

There is a third feature of the drama worth considering in this chapter: one of the most striking sentences of the author's preface ("Theodore de Besze aux lecteurs") is the passage in which he states that while his play contains elements of both tragedy and comedy, the former predominates, which is why he has chosen to name it as he has done ("Et pource qu'il tient plus de l'un que de l'autre, j'ay mieux aimé l'appeler Tragedie.").³⁰² The author does not comment further on the reasons for this judgment, and so we are permitted, or indeed invited, to make up for the missing information by means of our own interpretations or speculations. There is, indeed, not much material in the story to provoke the core element of comedy, laughter. I should like to suggest that the comic element the author ascribes to his dramatized version of the story consists mainly in the social stratum of the characters involved. Abraham was to become the father of kings, and also the father of a people who would subsequently spread out over the entire globe and defeat all its enemies,³⁰³ but as an individual he was a shepherd; he was certainly not a poor man, but his social status made it more or less impossible to consider him to be on the level of tragic characters as described in Aristotle's tract, and even more so according to the early modern standard readings of Aristotle's description of the tragic hero as *epieikes*.—At first sight, however, what is even more astonishing is Bèze's completely unproblematized description of the play as "more of a tragedy", to the extent that he feels entitled to assign his drama as a whole to this genre. The harmonious and almost fairytale-like conclusion of the biblical story seems to be in flagrant contradiction of what we are accustomed to characterizing as tragedy. A father torn between his love for his belated and only legitimate offspring and his obedience to his only god, finally doing what this god has ordered him to do and then blinding himself or cutting off the hand with which he has perpetrated the sacrifice—this could be, considered from our standard viewpoint, a tragedy; but we would be hesitant to classify as tragedy a drama ending in complete harmony.

There is indeed, as I have argued elsewhere,³⁰⁴ a basic tension between the world-model of tragedy and the Christian dogma. If this world has been saved

302 Théodore de Bèze, *Abraham sacrificant*. Tragédie françoise, Marguérite Soulié and Jean-Dominique Beaudin (eds.), Paris 2006, p. 35.

303 See lines 952–972 for these prophecies or promises, which are already included (with the exception of the reference to Christ's salvific deed) in the Hebrew Bible.

304 See *Discursive Renovatio in Lope de Vega and Calderón*, esp. chaps. 2 and 6.

by God's self-sacrifice, and if every human being is able to enjoy the benefits of this redemptive act by adhering to the Christian God and obeying his commandments—that is, if every human being is able to attain to constant and limitless happiness (“paradise”), albeit after death—there seems to be little room left for the tragic vision.³⁰⁵ This view, however, is contingent on the fact that, from the beginning of the nineteenth century onward, that is, starting with Hegel, we are accustomed to extracting one variant of the tragic from Aristotle's theory of the genre as available in the net, while neglecting the other. It is true that *Oedipus Rex* is the ultimate paradigm of the tragic not only in the modern understanding. When illustrating the principal characteristics of what he calls the “best” or “most beautiful variant of tragedy” (*kalliste tragoedia*),³⁰⁶ Aristotle refers in most cases to the Sophoclean play. However, there is another passage of his somewhat erratic tract in which he cites *Iphigeneia* as the best tragedy. It may be that a third passage in which he says that plays conforming to this latter pattern are to be considered “*deutera tragoedia*”, that is, belonging to the second-best kind of tragedy, expresses his opinion on the matter in the most consistent way, the more so as this classification is based on Aristotle's (aesthetic, social, moral) elitism: the model of *deutera tragoedia* is the more popular one because it appeals to the irenic illusions about the world cultivated amongst the common people.³⁰⁷

Be that as it may, one has to bear in mind that Aristotle does admit a model of tragedy—meaning, actions involving *pathos* (suffering) and thus causing *phobos* and *eleos* (pity and fear) amongst the spectators—which contains a happy resolution. The modern reception of Aristotle has relegated this variant to the background, for reasons which shall not be discussed at this point. When conceiving a play whose plot shows many striking similarities to *Iphigeneia he en Aulidi*,³⁰⁸ Bèze extracted the secondary definition from Aristotle's tract. He was thus able to satisfy a demand contingent upon the unique situation of his time: on the one hand, there was a wish to see the classical genre renewed by the

305 I should like to add to this brief characterization of the traditional Catholic dogma the Reformers' renewal of Augustine's dogma of predestination, at least with respect to the question at issue here. Going to hell as a member of the *massa damnata* is not tragic because it is not an exceptional, but a rather common fate; it is as much or as little tragic as physical death. The term “tragic” only makes sense if applied to exceptional and for this reason deeply shocking constellations.

306 See chap. 13.

307 See *Poetics* 1453 a 30 ff.

308 The play explicitly referred to in the Aristotelian tract is rather the *Iphigeneia he en Tauris* (fifth century BCE; see, e.g., 1452 b 5 ff.). But with respect to the questions here discussed,

creation of tragedies in the vernacular languages; but in an age when most intellectual discourse revolved around questions of faith, there was also the demand to orchestrate this renewal in such a way as not to jar with the basic elements of the Christian worldview.

The constellation just described renders evident, once again, that cultural material floating in the net is, indeed, “material” in the literal sense. It may be disassembled and then partially reused without there being a chance for anyone to “protest” that such a reutilization may in fact constitute an abuse, a disfigurement, or a distortion with respect to the original synthesis that was submitted to the net.

Basic Prerequisites

0.—Are there, finally, specific prerequisites for a community to take part in cultural exchange mediated by a virtual network as described above, that is, an in principle universal net? Or, to put it differently: is it conceivable for communities of humans to exist and even flourish without exogenous cultural impulses? The supposedly secluded cultural territories our ancestors called “national cultures” were in the first place a politically motivated construct of the age of nationalism, in cultural terms: of Romanticism. But what about former times, that is, those periods of human history in which technological devices facilitating the circulation of cultural items in the net did not yet exist?

1.—It seems that the question is primarily one of degree, as one may extrapolate from the present, in which such recent technologies as the Internet have dramatically augmented and accelerated the circulatory processes. Today, there are almost no territorial boundaries to the extension of the cultural net, as the infrastructure required consists of such seemingly dematerialized objects as radio waves and electricity. And since access to the circulating material has become easy and cheap, the power of control agencies seems to be waning dramatically. This outline of the present situation may be all too optimistic. Be that as it may, it shows that the relevance of the cultural (in the sense of technological) level reached by a given community is not negligible when it

there is not much difference between the two *Iphigeneia* plays. They both have a happy ending, and in both plays there is a risk of human sacrifice, which is, however, finally not consummated. The “first” *Iphigeneia* is closer to the biblical plot insofar as the sacrifice is explicitly commanded by a god and the sacrificial object is a child of the one who is called upon to obey the god’s will.

comes to the question of the extent to which this community is able to make use of the material floating in the net. As is evident from their eminent contributions to the world culture of later times, the somewhat modest cultural activities of Northern and Eastern European communities in the age under consideration and before are most probably not determined by their cultural or intellectual “inferiority”, but by the fact that their net-enabling infrastructures (roads, banks, monasteries, universities) were insufficient at the time.

2.—One even more basic determining factor is certainly—in an age before devices like the Internet were invented—mere density of population. Since the net, though virtual if considered as a whole, is basically a material thing if considered with regard to its actual components, there is no cultural exchange without physical contact. The relative lack of exchange between China and the West is an example already mentioned above; another one would be that between Europe and pre-Columbian America. This applies as well to communities which are not separated by geographic obstacles but live in isolation due to the fact that there is very much space in proportion to the numbers of humans occupying it.—Further factors to be taken into consideration are tools such as money and writing systems, both of which facilitate exchanges of all kinds.—The invention of print, that is, the ability to spread a huge number of low-cost copies of a given cultural item throughout the cultural net, certainly marks a third major step in the intensification of activities of exchange.—The technique of electronic encoding (telephone, television, Internet), that is, the almost complete dematerialization of the media of transmission, is obviously the fourth and, at this point in time, the last step. Observing the provisional results of this latest step, and its consequences for the shape of what we call culture and art, one may perhaps imagine what the consequences of a possible fifth or sixth step will be.

Since we are dealing with material processes, the development just outlined is in the first place quantitative. It will remain an unresolved question within this book whether the basic assumption of dialectical materialism is tenable—i.e., that qualitative (conceptual, spiritual) developments are the more or less automatic consequences of quantitative developments ratified from time to time by way of revolutions—or whether one should rather believe that qualitative leaps occur because they have been prepared by qualitative developments of a different order. Was it print technology which—by accelerating all sorts of cultural exchange processes—led to the “enlightenment” of huge portions of the European population, to the Age of Revolution, to technological modernity? Or was it the dissolution, briefly referred to above, of the firm belief in the Bible as the one and only, definitive source of Truth which was the determining factor in

early modern Europe's quest for new, undetected truths? Within this latter line of thinking, inventions such as print technology—which is not that difficult to imagine as soon as writing systems based on standardized letters begin to be used—would be conceived as based on ideas which remained latent for a certain period and presented themselves in new ways when conditions were propitious for the introduction of new or even revolutionary concepts.

3.—Floating processes of any kind do not only call for a physical medium, but also need energy to keep the material moving. If the processes are not natural (as in the case of a leaf floating in a stream), the energy must be both produced and invested in this specific floating process by humans, which implies that the quantity of material available in the cultural net is contingent upon the quantity of available energy that is not necessary for securing the physical subsistence of a given community. This somewhat tortuous statement signifies, in common language, nothing other than that the cultural net is all the more significant the wealthier a society is. Since wealth is contingent upon time, one might conclude that the quantitative dimensions of the cultural net evolve and grow with the passage from one age to the next. They do not grow continuously and smoothly, however, or it is not this kind of growth that is of primary significance. It seems that they evolve above all by means of “leaps” linked to technological evolutions whose main achievement is the reduction of the amount of energy necessary to keep material circulating in the net. Human bodies on the move require a good deal of energy. Writing technology reduces the amount of energy necessary to physically circulate cultural material; one human scribe suffices to put written cultural material (manuscripts) containing a huge quantity of information into circulation; the same quantity of information to be circulated using only the human mind and voice would necessitate sending thousands of humans out into the world. I have already mentioned the next such leap, namely the introduction of print technology, and the leap following that, the introduction of electronic information technology. The latter step, taken in the last two decades of the twentieth century, has reduced the energy necessary to keep cultural material circulating in a way inconceivable in the past. It has led to an intensity, celerity, and quantitative growth in the circulation of cultural material whose consequences are still incalculable. We may see the (from a historical perspective) quick, even abrupt rise and establishment of a largely homogenized global culture; we may face in the future attempts at violently interrupting, subverting, or destroying the infrastructure of this low-energy net.

If one keeps in mind what has been said so far regarding this point, the inevitable impression will be that this book basically endorses yet again the story of

“progress” which seems to have been relegated to obsolescence during the age we call postmodern. And indeed, it is a story of nearly continuous, albeit not always smooth evolution which is presented here. But it differs from the traditional narratives of progress as conceived in the Age of Enlightenment in that it does not equate quantitative growth with a growth in quality. Whether it is “happiness” or “freedom” which evolves in the process of continuous growth of cultural material floating in the net and of continuous growth of acts of extraction, or whether the process is one of growth and nothing more, shall remain an open question here. We do not know where this entire story called “human history” will lead us. Present-day natural science, however, seems to confirm what was already expressed in the more archaic, pre-Enlightenment version of the teleological story: namely, that this world, including the world of humans, had a beginning, and that it will also have an end; moreover, that the end of the human world will occur before the end of the natural world, understood as the mode of organization of matter familiar roughly for the past fourteen billion years. One may add to this reminder of biblical cosmology a reference to Augustine’s theory of the structures of the *civitas terrena*, and there are no more obstacles to telling a story of progress in terms of quantity which may be mainly static with regard to quality.

The Economy of Cultural Transfer

0.—When it comes to discussing processes of transfer of objects between humans, it is not only the case in our highly materialistic age, but has been since the beginnings of human civilization, that one is faced with the question of the extent to which the preponderance of our material necessities and of our greed, the need or the wish to appropriate material goods (food, clothing, tools facilitating our dominance over the rest of the natural world), governs the entirety of our dealings with other humans. Is the economic the hidden foundational structure of all our actions and interactions? There is no doubt that the economic principle governs, at least to a large extent, spheres of our lives that we would prefer to be ruled by more idyllic features such as emotion or love. Legal love (marriage) is to this day, and even in Western countries with their sentimentalist tradition developed in the age of Romanticism, in many respects an economic arrangement, i.e. a “deal”. What differentiates the modern Western economics of marriage from more traditional variants is mainly the fact that there is no longer a separation between the goods exchanged and the contractors. But the logic is still one of exchange: one gives something away and receives something in return. The basis is reciprocity, and the “deal” is about the adequacy of what is given and what is reciprocated.

1.—Is it an idealization of a secluded sphere of culture when I postulate that cultural exchange eludes the logic of reciprocation elsewhere observable or even omnipresent, including in social spheres we have a tendency to conceive of in more romanticized terms?³⁰⁹ There are, indeed, areas of cultural transfer which adhere to an economic logic. When a painting is sold, when a fee is charged for admission to a performance, when a manuscript is dedicated to a patron, or when the copyright to a book is sold to a publishing company, these transfers of cultural items evidently occur as processes of economic exchange. A work, or temporary access to a work, is exchanged for a certain amount of money (or for a service to be provided by the buyer, or for a favor expected from the patron, etc.). But interactions of this kind are not what I intend to designate when I speak of circulation of material in the cultural net. They constitute additional techniques for regulating access to the net, or rather access to materialized extractions from the net at a certain time and in a certain place.

What is characteristic of the processes taking place within the cultural net is the fact that there is no mandatory reciprocity; this seems to be a particularly decisive point when it comes to the question of whether or not the economy of cultural transfer is determined by the same laws as those of economics in the literal sense. There is in most cases no direct exchange, no *quid pro quo*. When a businessman transporting goods on the Silk Road narrates, during his stay in a caravanserai in Bagdad, a story he heard on the occasion of a dinner given for him in China, he does not do so under the condition that his business partners on the banks of the Euphrates present him with a “Mesopotamian” story that he can bring back to China and put into circulation there. Such processes may take place, and quite frequently they do, but *immediate* reciprocity is not a prerequisite for the transfer of cultural material. Cultural material is as free as air, at least as long as it has not reached the level of organization of individually attributable works of art. In cases where we are not its “creators”, but rather media of transmission, we typically give it away without expecting anything in return. Of course, we narrate a story to a business partner in order to entertain him and thus to create an atmosphere propitious to further business; that is, we expect something in return, but not necessarily on the same level, and not measurable as “equal” in terms of monetary value. As to the recipients involved in such transfer processes, this implies that they may ex-

309 For a view which conceives of this elusion as more than a mere idealization, but for different reasons than suggested here, see Stephen Greenblatt’s short essay “Culture”, in: Frank Lentricchia and Thomas McLaughlin (eds.), *Critical Terms for Literary Study*, Chicago, IL and London 1995 (2nd edition), pp. 225–229.

tract the material from the net without paying or reciprocating in some other way. If we listen to a story, we are free to remodel it and then narrate it to others. If we have writing skills, we are even free to use it as an inspiration for a story of our own which we might sell to a publishing company.

2.—This freedom of access and this emancipation from the principle of reciprocity seem to cast the cultural sphere as a space where quasi-paradisiacal structures have survived in our fallen world. To a certain extent, this is true; the uncontested esteem for, or even widespread love of cultural items may have their roots here. But it is necessary that I differentiate my argument from the nineteenth-century metaphysics of art, still current today, by drawing attention to the fact that the suspension of the reciprocity principle implies certain features that are not as popular amongst the enthusiasts of art as is freedom. Non-reciprocity implies the possibility of unidirectional cultural transfer. Unidirectional transfer leads to structures of dominance and, in the long run, to the establishment of cultural hierarchies. At least for the time being, there is much more cultural transfer from the West to the rest of the world than vice versa. Within the West, much more transfer occurs from the anglophone world to the rest than vice versa. Amongst the non-anglophone Western countries, there is much more transfer from bigger countries to smaller ones than vice versa. This tendency towards unidirectional movement in the net is not exclusive; it describes statistical preponderances only. And at least in the case of modern Western culture, it is partially compensated by what I have called “exoticism” above, the hunger of post-Romantic Western cultures, fixated on the ideal of innovation, to absorb everything that might appear as novel or “other”.

Thus, regarding the cultural sphere as emancipated from the reciprocity principle does not entail that a net structure as theorized in this book would lead to a universal egalitarianism among the world’s innumerable cultural communities. What it entails is rather a constant transfer, the permanent “re-culturation” of all “national” cultures on behalf of their connectedness to the one and only cultural net. It is this very fact which in turn destabilizes all sorts of statistical cultural dominance linked to the above-mentioned situation. If we accept for the moment the hypothesis that, under such conditions, the leading power of the present-day West, the United States, changes large parts of its cultural profile every fifty to one hundred years, “identity” becomes a mere ideologeme. This, however, problematizes the entire endeavor of the “legitimate fight against the dominant culture(s)” which is the centerpiece of all of present-day cultural theory.

3.—The concrete lines according to which these processes take place lie, of course, beyond the realm of culture in the strict sense. They are political and

economic. Strong and great powers put many more humans—the main agents of cultural transfer—in motion than weaker and smaller communities. On the other hand, I should like to stress that the relations described here are quantitative only. It is by no means to be excluded that a “genius” may emerge within a very small community and nevertheless attain worldwide resonance; but this is not a necessity either. Ingenuity should, according to my approach, be defined as a particularly marked capacity to meet the cultural demand(s) of many people for whom the author or artist in question may not even have intentionally conceived his work. It thus may be a constellation emerging by means of contingency as theorized by Aristotle in *De Interpretatione*: that is, as the result of two totally distinct causal chains which happen by chance to touch each other (*con-tangere*) and then generate something new and unheard of—which might explain the fact that such things are extremely rare. In all cases of “ingenuity”, there must be a “match” between the author in question’s specific way of writing and the needs and wants of a greater audience he did not have in mind; but there must also be a quite literal encounter between a cultural broker from outside and the work in question.

I should like to conclude this entire part by reminding readers once again that the most powerful textual unit in the history of the most powerful culture of all of world history thus far is the account of the life of a carpenter’s son from a tiny Roman colony on the eastern shores of the Mediterranean, first written down by people of humble background in a vernacular accessible to less than one percent of the Empire’s population; its immense impact was by no means caused by the activities of “revolutionary” metropolitan intellectuals pursuing the intention of promoting the “subaltern” of that age. This story thus calls for nothing less than a “metaphysical” explanation if one holds on to the theorem of the dominant culture as the culture of the dominant—an involuntary irony which is for this reason ignored or silenced by leftist cultural theory.