

Acknowledgements

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I developed the basic theoretical approach here outlined, which consists in a network theory of cultural (specifically literary) production. The main area of exemplification for the theoretical assumptions, early modern European drama, was chosen to accord with one of my primary fields of expertise. Over the years during which I was able to devote myself to this project—for which we created the name "DramaNet"—I profited enormously from working with the members of my team, who introduced me to ramifications of the questions pertaining to the field of exemplification previously unknown to me. The present book will refer to their publications wherever this is indicated according to standards of scholarly ethics; in order to provide some orientation, I will briefly characterize the thematic and methodological frames of the various more specialized studies resulting from the research team's endeavors in the last section of the chapter "Outline of the Argument".—In addition, I drew much invaluable inspiration from the papers read at the five conferences we were able to organize; the proceedings of these conferences have been published or will be published in the near future. Whenever this or that idea of "mine" might have been inspired by one of these papers, I have made this explicit.—During the tenure of the project, I was invited by prestigious universities from all over the world to present my hypotheses and provisional results. I am grateful in particular for the intense discussions I had with friends and colleagues at Princeton University, the École des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales, Paris, the Chinese University of Hong Kong, the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, Columbia University, the National Research University – HSE, Moscow, and, finally, UCLA.

Samuel Walker took up the task of correcting my English, and de Gruyter Publishing was ready to print the manuscript.

I should like to conclude this preface with an attempt at briefly contextualizing my approach within a broader framework reaching beyond the limits of cultural studies in the strict sense.

I need not give expression to the generally accepted view (which I share) that the concept of the nation-state—as it emerged embryonically after the Treaty of Westphalia (1648) and unfolded in the course of, and after, the Napoleonic Wars—was the basis of certain major achievements, such as the equality of all citizens with respect to political and juridical rights. It would not have been possible for humankind to immediately “leap” from the level of absolutist monarchies to a global state, in which every member of the species would be guaranteed equal rights.¹ This said, the modern national wars, starting with the Franco-Prussian war of 1870/1, and continued by the massacres of World War I and World War II, show that the concept of the nation-state is no longer viable in our times. Weapons technology has reached a level that will cause future wars in technologically advanced parts of the globe to result in collective extermination. The United Nations, the European Union, and the Transatlantic Alliance were answers to the questions put on the agenda by the two world wars of the twentieth century. In present-day Europe and beyond, industrial production, finance, and, in part, politics are no longer taking place within national circuits, but rather in decentralized network structures more or less analogous to those described in this book. Cultural consciousness seems to somewhat lag behind these “real-world” trends. My polemics against a concept of culture that originated in Romanticism are also meant as a contribution to a larger reconsideration of basic configurations which extends beyond the confines of literary and artistic production.

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1 The economic problems and the refugee crisis the European Union is facing at this point in time (2016) demonstrate that egalitarian politics that go further, culminating in the idea of a welfare state, are bound to the separation of a more or less homogeneous community from the rest of the species. It is a prerequisite of the much-acclaimed virtue of solidarity that all members of the community in question share certain general attitudes of behavior, including work ethics.