

# Making Sense of Popular Culture



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Edited by

María del Mar Ramón-Torrijos  
and Eduardo de Gregorio-Godeo

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## PREFACE

LOU CHARNON-DEUTSCH

Several years ago, while investigating the popularity of the Spanish Gypsy in the European imaginary, I spent some time revisiting a group of early practitioners of what could be called Cultural Studies *avant-la-lettre*, at the dawn of anthropological approaches to popular culture in the nineteenth century; that is, Cultural Studies before the development of such notions as thick description, habitus, multiculturalism, hegemony and interdisciplinarity. They called themselves the Romany Rye and they were a congenial group (of men), fervent aficionados of all facets of Gypsy culture. The loose society they formed, later evolving into the Gypsy Lore Society, was dedicated to the study and preservation of the folklore and customs of the Romany in England and abroad. Their work fed into the growing popularity of all things exotic that would eventually come to mark *fin-de-siècle* culture. The Rye readily adopted the role of benevolent intellectuals who celebrated and popularized the culture of the other as a ritual to conjure their difference and participate, in the words of Fredric Jameson who has criticized contemporary models of Cultural Studies as practiced in the twentieth century, “in the dances and solidarity of the ethnic tribe itself”. As early participant observers, during the summer the Romany Rye visited itinerant camps and even adopted some of the Travellers’ ways and dress. Then, when winter came around, they would return to their warm hearths to reflect on their adventures, write their reports and plan for their next, romantic, bohemian sabbatical. In some cases they rallied for improved conditions and rights or critiqued repressive measures against the groups they honored with their attention, but they never turned the mirror back on themselves to examine their own status and paternalistic methods as privileged intellectuals. In the absence of their acknowledgment of their role in the nation’s internal colonization, their exchange with the culture they studied was profoundly flawed, although today we remain grateful for the archival work and case studies without which much lore would have been lost forever.

Under the multidisciplinary umbrella of Cultural Studies, twentieth-century scholars similarly embraced the expression of various manifestations

of popular culture while struggling to develop more appropriate analytic tools through a more thoughtful and responsible approach informed by then current theoretical approaches to gender, race, and class that did not ignore their own subject position as members of privileged groups. Today, as reformed fans of popular culture, we are the twentieth-first century progeny of the Romany Rye; only, unlike them, we must be vigilant in recognizing our responsibility to go beyond engaging with popular culture as fans who express “solidarity with the ethnic tribe”. Today’s practitioners have still unfinished tasks to take on as cultural critics in a more complicated field as they recycle a far greater range of cultural practices, materials, and debates involving ideology, mass culture, subalternity, gender studies, propaganda, hybridization, interdisciplinarity, canonicity, cultural hierarchies, affect, disability—everything—, in other words, that complicates us as humans belonging to social groups involved in asymmetric power relations mediated through culture.

In their 1995 introduction, *Spanish Cultural Studies* editors Jo Labanyi and Helen Graham asserted that in Spain Cultural Studies were still in their infancy, a minority interest of the academy. The editors of the current volume, María del Mar Ramón-Torrijos and Eduardo de Gregorio-Godeo, offer us here a selection of essays that show how much things have changed since then. Although perhaps we still have not done enough to critically examine our methodologies, today there are many and more useful theoretical tools to face that challenge. In fact, the range of approaches to cultural studies is staggering, as varied as the multiple subjects that cultural critics approach. A barrage of theoretical and practical guides are available that both facilitate and complicate the study of culture. In *Making Sense of Popular Culture*, you will see traces of these many approaches to popular culture in a series of thought-provoking essays that attest to the richness and variety of debates that have been taking place in conferences in Spain under the auspices of SELICUP (Sociedad Española de Estudios Literarios de Cultura Popular).

# **INTRODUCTION**



## CHAPTER ONE

# THE STUDY OF POPULAR CULTURE ON THE AGENDA OF CULTURAL STUDIES

EDUARDO DE GREGORIO-GODEO  
AND MARÍA DEL MAR RAMÓN-TORRIJOS

The study of popular culture has come of age, primarily as it is now a deeply rooted area of concern for the well-established domain of cultural studies. Popular culture may be taken to be “the culture that appeals to, or that is most comprehensible by, the general public” (Edgar 2002b, 285). Academic interest in popular culture has become fundamental within contemporary cultural studies as “an interdisciplinary or postdisciplinary field of enquiry that explores the production and inculcation of maps of meaning” (Barker 2003, 437). As Barker (2004, 42) stresses in *The SAGE Dictionary of Cultural Studies*, together with other concepts, ideas and concerns (e.g. articulation, culture, discourse, ideology, identity, power, representation, text), “popular culture” is a key notion for work in cultural studies: “cultural studies understands popular culture to be an arena of consent and resistance in the struggle over cultural meaning” (Barker 2004, 148). By way of example, work by Fiske (1989a, 1989b), Goodall (1995), Strinati (1995), Storey (2009a, 2009b, 2010, 2015) or Guins and Zaragoza Cruz (2005) is just illustrative of the great interest in the field of popular culture from within contemporary cultural studies. The study of popular culture has accordingly become closely intertwined with current theoretical and methodological debates within cultural studies.

Prior to taking a deeper insight into current approaches to the field of popular culture—and its relationship with cultural studies—it seems indispensable to make some remarks on the specificity of the term “popular culture” vis-à-vis the term “culture”, which, on the other hand, is inherently central to the domain of cultural studies. As Terry Eagleton underscores, “‘culture’ is said to be one of the two or three most complex words in the English language” (2000, 1). “Culture” may be broadly conceived of as “the customs, beliefs, art, music, and all the other products

of human thought made by a particular group of people at a particular time” (*Longman Dictionary of English Language and Culture* 2005, 336). Taking a more scientific approach, cultural historian Roland Chartier echoes Darnton’s (1980) view when conceiving of culture as “an historically transmitted pattern of meanings embodied in symbols, a system of inherited conceptions expressed in symbolic forms by means of which men communicate, perpetuate and develop their knowledge about and attitude towards life” (Chartier 1988, 102). Today the idea of culture has become a pervasive area of concern across the social sciences and the humanities given the pervading influence of cultural studies as an inter-, post- and trans-disciplinary domain concerned not only with this notion but also with the cultural practices determined by power relations in society. As Tony Bennett puts it, “work in cultural studies is characterised by an interdisciplinary concern with the functioning of cultural practices and institutions in the contexts and relations of power of different kinds” (1998, 27).

The theoretical and methodological approaches to the study of culture have been most diverse precisely because of the multiplicity of materials incorporated by cultural studies, which, according to Alexander and Seidman, “spans many disciplines and it brings into play a fantastic array of theoretical, ideological and methodological viewpoints” (1990, vii). Such authors review relevant work in this sense ranging from culture and ideological hegemony perspectives (e.g. Gramsci) to signs and language debates (e.g. Ferdinand de Saussure) through many other approaches including the functionalist (e.g. Robert K. Merton), the semiotic (e.g. Roland Barthes), the dramaturgical (e.g. Erving Goffman), the Weberian (e.g. Michael Walzer), the Durkheimian (e.g. Victor Turner), the Marxist (e.g. E.P. Thompson), the poststructuralist (e.g. Michel Foucault and Pierre Bourdieu), the end-of-ideology (e.g. W. Adorno and Herbert Marcuse) or the post-modernist (e.g. Jean-François Lyotard and Jürgen Habermas). In this context, the idea of culture has been employed in a number of different ways which often overlap each other. Following Abercrombie, Hill and Turner’s (2000, 83) overview, “culture” is often contrasted with various other concepts: (1) “the biological” aspects of human society, which associates culture with language, custom and convention; (2) “nature”, which in the Anglo-French tradition leads to an identification of culture with civilization; (3) “structure”; and (4) “the material”, which serves many Marxist theorists to equate culture with the realm of beliefs, ideas and practices and hence with “ideology”. Abercrombie, Hill and Turner (2000, 83) likewise highlight the idea of culture as “a way of life” and posit the existence of a major distinction

between “high culture” and “popular culture”. Most of such considerations are shared by more thorough discussions on the meaning of culture like Mulhern’s (2006).

Stuart Hall, a founding father of cultural studies and a renowned figure within the field for his theorizing about the popular, managed to bridge the traditional divide between “high culture”, that is, “the sum of the great ideas as represented in the classical works of literature, painting, music and philosophy” (1997a, 2) and “popular culture”, to wit “the widely distributed forms of popular music, publishing, art, design and literature, or the activities of leisure-time and entertainment, which make up the everyday lives of the majority of ordinary people” (ibid.). To that end, Hall comes up with an all-encompassing definition of the term culture:

to refer to whatever is distinctive about the ‘way of life’ of a people, community, nation or social group. This has come to be known as the ‘anthropological’ definition. Alternatively, the word can be used to describe the ‘shared values’ of a group or of society—which is like the ‘anthropological’ definition, only with a more sociological emphasis (1997a, 2).

Hall’s emphasis on the importance of “ways of life” and “shared values” encapsulates the fundamental role of the popular for the study of cultures as a whole; hence, he lays a strong emphasis on the idea of culture as an exchange of meanings among individuals: “primarily, culture is concerned with the production and the exchange of meanings – the ‘giving and taking of meaning’ between the members of a society or group” (1997a, 2). In this regard, over the past few decades cultural studies has drawn particular attention to the popular in its attempt to disentangle the complexity of culture in contemporary societies. As underlined by Bérubé in this sense, “contemporary cultural studies has characteristically insisted on the importance of popular culture for the formation of (and the analysis of the formation of) social subjectivity” (2005, 6). In actual fact, this form of “revaluation” of the popular fostered by cultural studies has sometimes been taken to extremes by authors like Frow, whose analyses of culture in advanced capitalist societies evidence that “for precise historical reasons there is no longer a stable hierarchy of value (even an inverted one) running from ‘high’ to ‘low’ culture” (1995, 1), thereby questioning any such distinction between “high” and “popular” culture. In the context of such debates on the high-and-low culture continuum, we may conclude that there seems to be no doubt that the popular has come to acquire a most significant political dimension, which makes it such an essential category within current cultural studies and its mapping of cultures. As

emphasized by Barker in this regard, “as a political category, the popular is a site of power and the struggle over meaning. The popular transgresses the boundaries of cultural power and exposes the arbitrary of cultural classification through challenging notions of high/low” (2003, 445).

The present collection intends to provide a selection of recent insights into the study of the popular from cultural studies perspectives, thereby contributing to current debates around the popular within contemporary cultural studies. Dealing with issues to do with representation, cultural production and consumption or identity construction, this anthology includes chapters analysing different genres (e.g. film, television, fiction, print media, etc.) in various contexts by using a number of cultural studies-oriented theoretical and methodological orientations. The rationale underlying the sections of the collection, and indeed the inclusion of specific papers therein, is based on a number of theoretical constructs pervading cultural studies and the study of popular culture today. Firstly, in its approach to the popular, the volume embraces a well-established academic distinction between “texts” and “lived cultures” or “practices”. As stressed by John Storey in *Cultural Theory and Popular Culture*,

[...] different theoretical perspectives have tended to focus on particular areas of the popular culture landscape. The most common division is between the study of texts (popular fiction, television, pop music, etc.) and lived cultures or cultural practices (seaside holidays, youth subcultures, the celebration of Christmas, etc.) (2001, 15).

Thus, although most contributions in the volume focus on the study of specific “texts” of popular culture (e.g. print media, film, fiction, drama, pictorial texts), the study of the popular may not be easily separated from its dimension as “lived cultures” and “practices”, as show the chapters on youth or women’s spaces in the anthology by way of example. Secondly, this approach to the study of popular culture manifestations in terms of “texts” vs. “lived cultures”—or, following a similar dichotomy mentioned by Edgar (2002b, 285), in terms of “artifacts” vs. “practices” or “a group’s lifestyle”—is more widely embedded into a “circuit of culture” theory which, based on work by du Gay et al. (1997), considers the existence of five major “cultural processes” (i.e. representation, identity, cultural production, cultural consumption, and cultural regulation) “though which any analysis of a cultural text or artifact must pass if it is to be adequately studied” (1997, 3). So, in addition to the specific sections in the volume explicitly focusing on identity and representation, the subject of cultural production, consumption and regulation is similarly crucial for making sense of the chapters in the collection. Thirdly, the volume echoes major

debates respecting key issues in cultural studies and popular culture, such as the study of “ideology”, “canon” or “the postmodern condition” (cf. Barker 2003, 2004). Bearing this theoretical framework in mind, the present collection has been accordingly organized into five parts revolving around crucial areas of work in cultural studies today: the crossroads of print media and ideology in the construction of popular culture identities; significant aspects of spatial and visual representations in what might be described as “topographies” of popular culture; the oft-debated relationship between popular culture and the canon with a special focus on Shakespeare as a case in point; the connections between popular culture and youth; and the role of film and fiction in the articulation of narratives of the postmodern condition.

Part I of the volume incorporates contributions on the subject of identity construction. The notion of identity has become crucial for work in cultural studies. As Woodward emphasizes, “identity offers a way of thinking about the links between the personal and the social” (2002, vii). In examining ideology in print media, this section includes two papers exploring the fundamental role of the press in the war between the US and México (1846-1848) on the one hand, and such a popular culture genre as problem pages in Spanish and Bengali magazines on the other. In this context, Grossberg et al. underscore that “ultimately, the media’s ability to produce people’s social identities, in terms of both a sense of unity and difference, may be their most powerful and important effect” (2006, 220). So, with a strong focus on print media, both chapters shed light on “how cultural practices can offer new forms of identity and agency and serve as ways of subverting and negotiating dominant forms of identity” (Weedon 2004, 10). In particular, the section provides insights into the study of ideology, a category which Turner conceives of as being “the most important conceptual category in cultural studies” (1996, 182). Mark Cronlund Anderson opens Part I of the volume with a chapter delving into the American press coverage of the USA’s war with Mexico (1846-48) as a significant example of how popular culture in the USA has aided and abetted America’s martial instincts by mythologizing conflicts like this abroad, especially in Latin America. His thorough examination of the press coverage of this military conflict at the time sheds light on the imperial character of the Mexican War which, as Anderson puts it, “is often referred to as America’s ‘forgotten war’ by scholars” precisely because “it so openly flouted American anti-imperial self-perceptions when the Mexican War was so obviously an imperial conflict in itself”. In the second chapter, Sutanuka Banerjee and Isabel Jiménez-Lucena analyse a broad selection of problem pages in Spanish and Bengali magazines

from the 1930s and 1940s adopting a cross-cultural perspective. Focusing on the advice columns “Preguntas y Respuestas” from *Estudios* (1930-1937) and “Prescription” from *Nara-Naree* (1940-1948), they examine the intersecting issues of morality and modernity, culture and science in both contexts. The textual analysis conducted reveals “how the magazines assessed the normative discourses on sexuality at the time and their responses towards such a complicated subject in their respective cultural contexts”.

As Barker puts it, “to understand culture is to explore how meaning is produced symbolically through signifying practices of representation” (2002, 226). Cultural theorist Stuart Hall conceives of representation as being “an essential part of the process by which meaning is produced and exchanged between members of a culture” (1997b, 15). He adds that “it does involve the use of language, of signs and images which stand for or represent things” (ibid.), image and visuals being indeed a major medium of representation culturally charged. With a focus on spatial and visual representations, Part II of the volume delves into what might be taken to be “topographies” of popular culture. “Topography”, namely “(the science of describing or mapping) the character of an area, especially as regards the shape and height of land” (*Longman Dictionary of English Language and Culture* 2005, 465), seems to be an illuminating metaphor for exploring the role of space in popular culture. As it is, the notion of “space” is greatly drawn attention to given its key cultural dimension. Fiske metaphorically underlines in this respect that:

the powerful construct ‘places’ where they can exercise their power—cities, shopping malls, schools, workplaces and houses, to name only some of the material ones. The weak make the places temporarily theirs as they move through them, occupying for as long as they need or have to. A place is where strategy operates (1989a, 32-33).

So, the three papers of this section examine issues like the relations between women and space in a variety of contexts, the use of popular artistic motifs in intermedial figuration, and the representation of 1950s American suburbia in contemporary film. In the first chapter of Part II of the collection, José Manuel Estévez-Saá discusses what the author describes as “the complexities of the relationship between women and space throughout time, understanding women’s space both, in a literal sense, as a physical place inhabited by or denied to women, and, in a figurative sense, as a place of and for reflection of women and by women”. In his paper, the author dwells on the place of woman in different (con)texts—whether real or symbolic spaces—contending that

this is something that still requires careful consideration and scrutiny if only to compensate for the oblivion to which traditionally the topic has been subject to. By considering a carefully chosen selection of influential texts on the subject, Estévez-Saá revises “how women have had to explore and conquer not only physical places but also spaces for reflection and creation that had been historically denied to them”. With a focus on the field of artistic semiotics and the phenomenon of *the Popular* across verbal and visual media, Elżbieta Chrzanowska-Kluczevska’s chapter explores different figurative devices—including eleven master tropes of human conceptualization—in pictorial texts. By proposing her “own (slightly mitigated) approach to the phenomenon of popular artistic creativity helpful in analysing both visual and non-visual cultural artefacts”, Chrzanowska-Kluczevska tracks some examples of common themes in European culture, and particularly the influence of the Spanish painterly motifs on the fine arts of other countries, visible since the Baroque (e.g. Velázquez, Murillo, Goya, Picasso). Following the author’s analysis, the *intermedial* character of such figuration is best embodied in Spanish themes creatively transformed into “the paintings, drawings, *emballages* and performances of Tadeusz Kantor (1915-1990), a Cracovian avant-garde painter, theatre producer and stage designer” whose production manifests a purposeful blurring of high/avant-garde and popular art. Finally, Pablo Gómez Muñoz’s article explores the success of the television drama series *Mad Men* (Matthew Weiner, 2007-present) as part of a larger trend in cinematographic productions set in postwar US suburbia. Following an interdiscursive approach focusing on gender roles, race, sexuality, and disparate lifestyles, Gómez Muñoz argues that, as evidenced by the success of films like *Far From Heaven* (Todd Haynes, 2002), *Revolutionary Road* (Sam Mendes, 2008) and *The Tree of Life* (Terrence Malick, 2011), “current cinematic revisions of postwar suburbia have developed a structure of feeling that appears to be spreading in the USA”. Through this analysis, the author concludes that such films “demolish the ideal of suburban life and empathize with America’s diversity, exploring topics such as alienation, disability, race, gender and sexuality”.

According to Edgar, with the emergence of cultural studies “the idea of the canon has come under increasing criticism” (2002a, 51). By examining the literary production of the figure of William Shakespeare, Part III of the monograph explores the blurring between the canon and the popular when it comes to the generic hybridity articulated in the literary production of Shakespeare on the one hand, and the use of Romeo and Juliet as a device for propaganda in totalitarian regimes on the other. Both chapters are

highly representative of how cultural studies may successfully challenge the fact that, to a great extent, until the emergence and consolidation of cultural studies as a field of enquiry, “the policing of the boundaries of a canon of ‘good works’ had led to the exclusion of popular culture” (Barker 2004, 19). Himmet Umunc’s chapter on generic hybridity in William Shakespeare casts light on the mechanisms whereby Shakespeare took into account the socially varied structure of his audience in Elizabethan England and came to draw upon the use of generic hybridity in his drama by combining the hilarity of comedy and the austerity of tragedy in order to captivate both common people and the more educated audience, thereby managing “to blend in his drama popular and high culture and thus capture his audience”. Through an analysis of selective excerpts of Shakespeare’s dramatic production, Umunc illustrates Shakespeare’s use of generic hybridity and popular culture, arguing that “in his drama were merged the common and the noble, the popular and the elite, the carnivalesque and the serious, and generically comedy and tragedy”. In the last chapter of the section, Rubén Jarazo Álvarez and Elena Domínguez Romero conduct an in-depth study of William Shakespeare’s *Romeo and Juliet* as a play that has been hardly considered from the perspective of its reception within totalitarian regimes that have used it in an attempt to reinforce their political domination. With a focus on its adaptation within various totalitarian regimes (i.e. the Arab and Turkish worlds, China, the former Soviet Union, Japan, Cuba and Spain), Jarazo Álvarez and Domínguez Romero’s paper analyses how, taking *Romeo and Juliet* as a case in point, it is not only true that “Shakespeare adapts his own sources to the sociopolitical movements of his time and thus opens the play to the expression of opposed voices”, but, more importantly for the purpose of their piece, “in totalitarian regimes, his plays [in general and *Romeo and Juliet* in particular] were a medium for communicating truths and horrors otherwise unspeakable, but also [...] a means for propaganda on the regimes’ side”.

The study of “the assemblage of people” referred to as “youth” (Lewis 2002, 285) has been of major concern for cultural studies since its inception. Part IV of the volume accordingly explores the connection between popular culture and youth as a fundamental category of analysis for cultural studies, traditionally interested in “the role of youth cultures which help young people to distinguish themselves from the adult community” (Walton 2008, 150). Thus, the papers in this section examine the communist media in the 1953 International Youth Festival, the academic status of children’s literature in contemporary Spain, and young adult pop fiction in America. The forth part starts with Andrada Fätu-

Tutoveanu's chapter, which draws attention to a unique event in terms of foreign politics and the types of propaganda associated with it, namely the International Youth Festival held in Bucharest in August 1953, which was representative of the connection existing between politics and popular culture in the Eastern Bloc after WWII. Fătu-Tutoveanu approaches this youth's popular-culture manifestation through the functions that such an event played within Soviet propaganda. In particular, the author analyses the ideological reflection of this celebration in the discourse promoted by Romanian media at the time, thereby investigating youth identity construction and media propaganda strategies mainly focusing on the role played by ceremonies and parades as specific forms of popular culture used to legitimize this totalitarian regime. Dealing with children's literature in the second chapter of this section, J. Igor Prieto-Arranz thoroughly explores the academic status of children's literature in Spain with a special focus on Spanish academia. After contextualizing the subject alluding to "the still uncomfortable position of children's literature within (1) school and even higher education curricula; and (2) academic research", Prieto-Arranz discusses some of the main contributions in Spain to the different subgenres of children's literature while reflecting on the critical work on these works conducted by both foreign and Spanish scholars. According to Prieto-Arranz, the status of children's literature—the "Cinderella" of literary studies—is perfectly applicable to the Spanish academic context. He concludes on a positive note—hoping for a future "in which children's authors are no longer on the margins of the academically-established literary canon". Lastly, relying on the context of twenty-first century emotional culture, Alicia Otano's contribution examines *The Hunger Games* trilogy—an emblematic and successful sample of science-fiction thrillers for young adults—laying special emphasis on the role of empathy as a communicative, cross-cultural, narrative tool. In Otano's view, *The Hunger Games* series cultivates a reader/character identification along with the reader's empathetic response towards its plot and main characters, which has resulted in increasingly successful sales within a specific reading sector of the market. In the light of emotions theory (Nussbaum 2003; Keen 2007; Hogan 2011), Otano concentrates on the role played by emotions in fiction, thereby exploring the way in which they work in order to develop readers' emotional neediness and describing how they interact in order to convey beliefs and principles which are successfully embraced by readers.

Part V in the book examines the narratives of the postmodern condition in both fiction and film. As stated by Baldwin et al., "postmodernity describes a number of different social changes: the 'globalization' of the

world's economy, the growth of population movements and speed and quantity of information exchanges" (2004, 215). In this sense, the essays in the fifth section of the volume point to the theoretical framework and cultural phenomenon known as *postmodernity* by discussing its impact on popular culture through the analysis of emblematic examples of postmodern fiction and films alongside a discussion of the return to the native in contemporary postcolonial British film. All in all, the contributions in this part substantiate Strinati's position in his overview of different theories of popular culture that "in assessing the emergence of postmodernisms within contemporary popular culture [...] it is clearly possible to find examples which clarify the claims of postmodern theory" (1995, 239). Drawing upon Elizabeth Young's definition of transgressive fiction (1992)—also known as "blank fiction"—and extending the range and context of such counter-culture fiction to the literary production of a great number of writers including "Goethe, Dante, Bram Stoker, Mary Shelley, Dostoyevsky, Marquis de Sade, D.H. Lawrence, Anthony Burgess, William Burroughs, William Gibson, Bret Easton Ellis, Irvine Welsh, Chuck Palahniuk, Douglas Coupland, Kathy Acker, Elizabeth Wurtzel and many more", Murat Göç's chapter focuses on the function and position of transgressive fiction within popular culture, particularly considering transgressive fiction as a postmodern genre and discussing to what extent it still transgresses the boundaries of social order and normality. The author concludes the first chapter of this section stressing in this respect that "rather than being a matter of aesthetic choice or literary taste, transgressive fiction has survived in different forms and under different names through ages of neglect and suppression because it has been loyal to the truth of humanity; therefore it has been truly personal and political". In the second chapter of Part V, Ángel Mateos-Aparicio reflects upon the existing controversy that surrounds the concept of utopia and the postmodern paradigm that refuses any totalising idea—which would include the notion of utopia itself. However, he argues, such postmodern doubts about utopia seem to have been appropriated by the dominant capitalist discourse to justify the lack of alternatives to global capitalism. From this perspective, Mateos-Aparicio's article describes how the recent postmodern science-fiction movies that he analyses (i.e. *Matrix*, *V for Vendetta*, *In Time* and *Verbo*) challenge the conviction that there is no alternative to global capitalism by offering wide audiences a popular notion of utopia in accordance with Jameson's (2005) vision of utopia as "a fluid, multiple, ambivalent and changing concept" that would fit perfectly well into the postmodern framework. In the last chapter of Part V and indeed of the collection, Ashvin I. Devasundaram conducts a

cinematic reading of India's postcolonial master narrative through a detailed analysis of the postcolonial British film *The Best Exotic Marigold Hotel* (2012). Devasundaram conceives of the narrative itself along with the characters and their intercultural encounters as being immersed in the postmodern condition, particularly due to the feeling of "uncertainty"—"an intrinsic property of the twenty-first century" according to Amit and Rapport (2012)—which impinges upon the characters when migrating to India seeking a new life with the aim of transforming "anomie and alienation" into "fulfilment and self-affirmation". Especially relevant to his analysis is the concept of "disjuncture", which Appadurai (1990, 1996) describes as a persistent element in the imagining of global communities—a concept which, alongside the notion of "community", shapes the dialectic and binary relationship which informs the interaction between the characters—elderly British immigrants—and their destination—postcolonial India. Furthermore, in Devasundaram's view, the film encloses in its narrative Arjun Appadurai's five dimensions of global socio-cultural flows (i.e. ethnoscaples, technoscaples, finanscaples, mediascaples and ideoscaples), which Devasundaram explores in detail as manifested in the film. Additionally, the author incorporates into his analysis a number of fundamental concepts which commonly remain at the core of colonial/postcolonial narratives, for example, the dialectical discourses of imagined communities, the concept of "reverse migration" as is specifically portrayed in the film, the notion of transglobal intercultural exchange, or the emergence of a "third space" from which hybrid discourses—in this case emanating from the confluence of "reverse migrants" and "natives" in the aforementioned postcolonial space—arise.

All in all, in exploring the interface between cultural studies and popular culture through a number of significant case studies, the present collection may be of interest not only within the fields of cultural studies and popular culture studies, but also within media and communication studies, film studies or gender studies among others. As it is, perhaps one of the major strengths of the volume lies in its use of different methodological approaches for the examination of the popular in its various manifestations, the articles in the collection serving to shed light on a commonly held practice within cultural studies implementing often implicit methodologies for its various types of analyses. Johnson et al. emphasize in this respect that precisely "by remaining implicit, methods of cultural study can function as a form of intellectual privilege or cultural capital, making the difference between being inside and outside a cultural studies club" (2004, 3). The different contributions in the book may thus illuminate the methodological approaches which, within a broader cultural

studies orientation, may be drawn upon for the analysis of specific forms of popular culture.

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## **PART I**

# **CONSTRUCTING IDENTITIES IN POPULAR CULTURE: PRINT MEDIA AND IDEOLOGY**

