

## B

**BACK STAGE OR REGION** In Erving Goffman's *dramaturgy*, the back stage is contrasted with the front stage; it is the space in which people can relax and drop their *role* performance. In the example of a restaurant, the kitchen is the back stage area in which waiters can joke, mock customers and toy with the food. When they come through the door into the restaurant's front stage, they are supposed to slip effortlessly into the controlled performance of the attentive waiter.

**BAKHTIN, MIKHAIL (1895–1975)** A Russian writer concerned with literature and language, Bakhtin's life was inextricably caught up with the history of the Soviet Union. Like many unorthodox intellectuals he was arrested in the late 1920s and was forced into internal exile. Later, one of his books was destroyed at the publisher's premises during the attempted Nazi invasion of the USSR; the book never appeared because, though he had kept notes, he famously used up a large share of them as make-shift cigarette paper during the war. Bakhtin was a pioneer in the socio-linguistic analysis of fiction, particularly novels. He was also fascinated by the phenomenon of carnival, specifically in carnivals dating from the European Middle Ages during which grotesque and improper behaviour was encouraged and social hierarchies were disrupted. For Bakhtin, carnival indicated the widespread potential for subverting established world-views and

the status quo. It is this aspect of his work that has most appealed to contemporary cultural commentators.

**BARTHES, ROLAND (1915–80)** Barthes was a key figure in the development of *semi-otics*, the study of signs, where he adapted the linguistic arguments of Ferdinand de Saussure to apply to the analysis of culture and cultural symbols. Saussure had emphasised that words are arbitrary indicators of meaning: there is nothing about the word 'snail' that fits it to describe snails. Another word would do just as well. Barthes argued that cultural symbols are often just as arbitrary: thus, a deerstalker and cape have come to stand for the garb of a detective. From this point it is a short step to suggest that the study of culture is fundamentally about reading cultural signs. Barthes often distinguished between what something denotes (what it literally stands for or represents) and what it connotes (what it implies or suggests). Cultural goods are often valued for what they connote as much as what they denote. Thus, a 'designer' handbag often functions no better as a handbag than would other makes, but is valued for what it connotes.

**BASE AND SUPERSTRUCTURE** Karl Marx used the terms to express the relationship between the economy (the base) and other features of society (the superstructure): the nature of the economy and its level of

productivity is held to determine such other things as the political structure, the legal system, the nature of the state and so on. Marx recognised that the real world is not that simple and that actual relationships may often run in the other direction (for example, the ability of a state to maintain law-and-order will have a major effect on economic development) but it is a defining characteristic of Marxist thought that, in the big picture, the influence of the base on the superstructure is greater than the latter's effect on the former.

**BASIC HUMAN NEEDS** Lay people and professional social scientists talk often of basic human needs but it is not easy to find agreement about just what they are once we move beyond the purely biological needs of food and shelter. If we starve or freeze to death we are no longer human. But what else is foundational? The list is commonly extended to take in what are thought to be necessary preconditions for full participation in social life. This raises the question of exactly which needs are given by our human constitutions and which are a result of socialisation into a particular culture. For example, some sociologists of religion argue that almost all societies have religions because the human condition creates a need for gods; others counter that religions socialise people into feeling the needs that religions can satisfy. As is clear in his discussion of alienation, Karl **Marx** supposes that the opportunity to express oneself through creative work is a basic human need.

**BATAILLE, GEORGES (1897–1962)** French philosopher Bataille lived a dual life. By day he was a respectable librarian at the Bibliothèque Nationale and philosopher; by night he was a sadist and alcoholic who wrote pornography. He is mentioned in social theory because Roland **Barthes**, Jacques **Derrida**,

and Michel **Foucault** have all claimed him as a prophet of **postmodernity**. In the 1920s he was involved in surrealism, in the late 1930s in anti-fascist politics, and after the Second World War he founded and edited *Critique*, a major influence on Foucault and Jean **Baudrillard**.

**BAUDRILLARD, JEAN (1929–)** Although he is often classed with **Lyotard** and **Derrida** as a postmodernist, French sociologist Jean Baudrillard is better described as a disappointed Marxist who, like the members of the **Frankfurt School**, turned his attention to popular culture and the media in an attempt to explain the failure of the working class to play its revolutionary role. He is best known for the argument that modern societies are so saturated by the mass media that reality loses its meaning. People are no longer participants in their own lives but observers of what the media has turned into 'spectacles'. An example is pornography, which ought to represent unconstrained sexual excess but has been turned by the media into nothing; a symptom of the dreary and relentless commodification of everyday life. Baudrillard can therefore be seen as proposing a peculiarly radical form of **semiotics**; in our 'age of simulacra' there are only signs and representations. All prospect of access to real things has disappeared. This situation he terms hyperreality. With his own flair for publicity, Baudrillard famously claimed that the 1991 Gulf War did not happen apart from its appearance on television. That said, it is clear that the war actually took place, but its meaning and the details of what happened are inseparable from the televised coverage.

**BAUMAN, ZYGMUNT (1925–)** His career began in his native Poland at the University of Warsaw in the 1950s but when he became disillusioned with **Marxism** he was encouraged to emigrate to Israel. He then moved to

Leeds in northern England. He first came to prominence with *Modernity and the Holocaust* (1989) in which he argued that the Holocaust was a particularly modern phenomenon to be explained by modern technology, by modern bureaucratic methods for handling large numbers of people, and by the lack of responsibility that Bauman regarded as a consequence of modernisation. He later became associated with various aspects of **postmodernism**.

**BECK, ULRICH (1944–)** Ulrich Beck's work became widely known to an international audience in the early 1990s when his book *Risk Society: Towards a New Modernity* (1986) was first published in English translation. Though the book is wide-ranging and often surprisingly impassioned in its arguments, most readers agree that he makes two novel claims. First, he proposes that contemporary societies differ from their predecessors because of the central importance of the handling of risk. Of course, early modern societies – in the 16th and 17th centuries for example – faced many threats. Bad weather might ruin harvests, disease might strike uncontrollably. Such risks were beyond human control. Subsequently, industrialisation and the growth of medical and technical knowledge allowed people to exercise more control over their environments. Weather forecasting diminished the threats to harvests. There was less risk and people were optimistic that further risks would come under control. Insurance and compensation schemes allowed people to be indemnified against risk to a large extent. However, by the final quarter of the 20th century risk had re-emerged. This time the risks were typically of human creation. Societies are threatened by the possibility of catastrophic nuclear power station failures or by climate changes caused by emissions into the atmosphere, and, unlike the case of typical industrial risks, it is hard to see how one could meaningfully

insure against such hazards. The handling and regulation of such risks becomes so consequential that it changes the character of contemporary societies. Society is no longer primarily a class society, it is a risk society.

Beck's second claim is that, in risk societies, there are widespread difficulties with the generation of authoritative knowledge. On the face of it, this claim is similar to that of **postmodernism**. However Beck argues that the problem confronting knowledge is really one of 'reflexive modernisation'. In other words, in the face of the new risks, medical, scientific and technical knowledge is subjected to closer and closer scrutiny. Faced with this relentless self-examination, expert knowledge becomes less certain and often more divided. Some experts speak in favour of nuclear power, others against. The authority of technical knowledge goes into decline.

Beck's work has become increasingly widely acknowledged largely because – unlike many sociological theorists – his ideas appear to have been borne out in readily understandable ways. Following the publication of his book there were major risk problems surrounding 'mad cow disease' and the planting of genetically modified crops. Beck's observations seemed to be bang on target.

**BECKER, HOWARD S. (1928–)** Although he made important contributions to the study of professional socialisation with *Boys in White: Student Culture in the Medical World* (1961) and to sociology of music with his studies of jazz musicians (he was an accomplished jazz pianist), Becker is best known for his pioneering work on **labelling theory** and his insistence that **value-freedom** was an obstacle to sociology's mission to give a voice to the underdog.

**BEHAVIOUR** Although commonly used as a synonym for action or conduct, behaviour

is usefully contrasted with action so that it refers to the automatic or reflex (such as jumping when stung) while action denotes intention, purpose and conscious thought. While there is little difficulty in distinguishing extreme cases of both, much social conduct falls into an ambiguous middle ground in that it is so much a product of effective socialisation that the actor would require a considerable effort of will to act otherwise.

**BEHAVIOURISM** Strictly speaking a school within psychology rather than sociology, behaviourism was an attempt to set up a programme to study behaviour scientifically. Behaviourists argued that scientific analysis depends on verifiable observations. But, since consciousness, meanings and motivations are private, they cannot be observed. A scientific approach to human conduct must therefore depend on analysing connections between observable inputs – stimuli – and observable outputs – responses. The programme never took off as a way of studying human conduct since these ‘scientific’ interpretations of human behaviour seemed much poorer than actors’ own accounts or the accounts of novelists. However, the behaviourists’ insistence on studying observable and verifiable aspects of human conduct has been echoed across the social sciences (especially **ethnomethodology**).

**BEHAVIOUR MODIFICATION** This denotes a variety of techniques for the deliberate reshaping of human behaviour based on structured learning. One such is systematic desensitisation: the treatment of phobias by gradually introducing the sufferer to the feared object in a controlled setting. Another is the token economy favoured by some mental hospitals, schools and other institutions: individuals are awarded tokens when they perform some desired action (such as getting dressed or tidying up) and accumulated tokens are exchanged for rewards such as

special meals or a day out. A third form of behaviour modification is aversion therapy, which works by negative reinforcement. An example is the implanting a chemical in the stomachs of alcoholics which causes vomiting when alcohol is drunk.

**BELIEF SYSTEM** This denotes any complex of interrelated propositions. The ‘system’ implies a degree of coherence and the presence of some integrating general principles. Christianity is an example of a belief system. Max **Weber** used *Weltanschauung* or **worldview** in the same way. Although there is no consensus about finer points of usage, worldview suggests something broader, less propositional and more taken for granted than belief system.

**BELL, DANIEL (1919–)** This American sociologist and essayist is best known for his argument in the *End of Ideology* (1960) that antagonistic class ideologies had declined in industrial societies. *The Coming of Post-Industrial Society* (1973) was an attempt to depict the sort of society that had displaced the class-ridden societies which sociology had tried to comprehend. Also influential was *The Cultural Contradictions of Capitalism* (1976), which argued that the individualistic hedonistic culture, typical of advanced capitalist societies, was a threat to the rationality required by the economic system.

**BENJAMIN, WALTER (1892–1940)** Benjamin was a German essayist and literary critic allied to left-wing groups. During the 1920s he became acquainted with members of the **Frankfurt School** and, like them, was interested in the role of popular culture. For many years he was best known for an essay on ‘The work of art in the age of mechanical reproduction’ (1938), which analysed what would happen to ideas of elite cultural value and

originality when artworks could be reproduced without the intervention of artists or skilled performers. As the Nazis rose to power, he left Germany for France. He later tried to flee France also but committed suicide in 1940 in the Spanish Pyrenees when his escape failed. Benjamin's reputation rose at the end of the 20th century when *The Arcades Project* (1999) was published in full. This ambitious work was an attempt to record an alternative narrative of reality that 'issued forth from unconscious collective memory'. Benjamin collected thousands of snippets of observation from shopping arcades in Paris, Berlin, Naples and Moscow: he noted street fashions, postures, advertising texts and images. He has come to be celebrated as a pioneer in studies of cultures of consumption.

**BENTHAM, JEREMY (1748–1832)** The English political philosopher, jurist and social reformer is best known to contemporary sociology for the use Michel **Foucault** makes of his prison reform schemes. It is unfortunate that Foucault's presentation of Bentham's design for the panopticon (a shape of prison that would allow constant surveillance of prisoners by guards) has led current students to regard him as a reactionary oppressor. In the context of the state of British prisons at the time, Bentham was a progressive radical (something recognised by his being made a citizen of France by the revolutionaries in 1792) who, among other good works, founded University College, London. He was a leading **utilitarian** and was responsible for the dictum that the proper object of all government was 'the greatest happiness of the greatest number'.

**BERGER, PETER LUDWIG (1929–)** Co-written with Thomas Luckmann, Berger's *The Social Construction of Reality* (1967) was extremely influential in making widely known in the English-speaking world the

phenomenological approach to sociology pioneered by Alfred **Schutz**. He also wrote extensively on the sociology of religion (especially on **secularization** and **charisma**). Because he took the view that, in the context of liberal democratic societies, competing religious perspectives must undermine the authority and plausibility of religion, he was initially a strong advocate of the secularisation paradigm but in later work he argued that privatised relativistic religion could survive.

With his wife Birgitte Berger, he wrote *War over the Family* (1983): an attempt to steer a middle-way between the growing body of feminist criticism of the family and functionalist defences of the institution.

He also made important contributions to the sociology of development. His *Pyramids of Sacrifice* (1974) was a critique of both capitalist and communist approaches to the Third World but he later became convinced that capitalism offered the best opportunity for economic and social advance. He thus set himself against the popular **dependency** and **world-systems theories**. As a director of research programmes he was influential in reviving the Weberian sociological concern with the cultural conditions for economic development.

**BERNSTEIN, BASIL (1924–2000)** See **elaborated and restricted codes**.

**BHASKAR, ROY (1944–)** See **critical realism**.

**BIAS** In general usage this denotes the pre-supposition or preference that distorts our observations or conclusions. The term is also used by statisticians to refer to the difference between the hypothetical 'real' distribution of some characteristic in a population and the extent of it in a particular sample; the difference is referred to as a

'sampling bias'. For example, if we know from the census that the population of a particular town is 52 per cent female and find that in our postal survey only 45 per cent of respondents are female, we may multiply the scores given to the answers from women respondents to compensate for that bias and give a proportionate weighting to female responses.

**BIRTH RATE** The birth rate for a society or population is normally the number of live births per 1000 people of all ages in one year.

**BLACK** Brief terms used to describe groups of people are always contentious, as are the implied groupings of people so described. Even terms that are not intended to be insulting may come to be seen as such and require replacing by terms that have not yet acquired derogatory connotations. Over the 20th century 'Negro' gave way to 'coloured' and then to 'black'; the favoured term of 1960s US activists. By the end of the century 'black' was in turn giving way to 'Afro-American' and 'people of African origin'. Asians often object to the use of 'black' or 'non-white' because it treats as homogenous such various peoples as Africans, West Indians, Pakistanis and Indians. On the other hand, some insist that a simple black/white dichotomy is useful because it reflects the reality of racial discrimination in many societies.

Sociologists need to be alive to their choice of terms for ethnic groups both to avoid offence and to tap the worldviews of those who interest us. Surveys that use terms that do not correspond to respondents' categories and experience will not generate useful data. In qualitative research and small-scale surveys we can adopt the terms used by those we study. In large surveys (such as national censuses) researchers normally pilot a tentative classification in order to find the best combination of brevity and effectiveness.

**BLACK-COATED WORKER** The term was coined by English sociologist David Lockwood to describe routine clerical and office workers in the days when a dark suit was required office wear. It was superseded by 'white-collar worker' as suit cloth became more varied in colour, more women entered the labour market, and offices became commonly heated to a temperature where suit jackets were removed on arrival.

**BLACK ECONOMY** See *informal economy*.

**BLAU, PETER (1918–2002)** One of the pioneers of detailed studies of *bureaucracy*, Blau extended Max Weber's work with an interest in the 'informality' that social interaction adds to formal organisations and with attention to the dynamic aspects of organisations. He was also important in developing *exchange theory* (with its central place for rewards and penalties in shaping social interaction) to explain both the stability of social structures and social change. He was unusual among exchange theorists for his stress on the constraints that social structures, though created by them, impose on actors.

**BLOCH, MARC (1886–1944)** A French medieval historian and co-founder of the *Annales School* of historical research, Bloch is best known to sociology for his *Feudal Society* (1961): a magisterial study of feudal society as a whole that greatly informed our understanding of the differences between feudal and capitalist societies.

**BLUE-COLLAR WORKER** Usually part of a contrast pair with 'white-collar worker', this is the preferred US term for an industrial manual worker and often carries the implication of union membership.

blumer, herbert (1900–87)

**BLUMER, HERBERT (1900–87)** Blumer published relatively little. The collection of essays *Symbolic Interactionism: Perspective and Method* (1969) is almost his entire corpus. But he exerted an enormous influence on US sociology from his position at the University of Chicago. He was very young, when on his mentor's sudden death, he was invited to take over George Herbert Mead's lectures on social psychology. He gradually moved Mead's thought in an overtly sociological direction and coined the term **symbolic interactionism** to describe the end result.

Over a long career he made distinctive contributions to the study of race relations and collective behaviour but he is probably best known for his methodological critiques of positivism. In the classic Chicago tradition of preferring detailed ethnography to statistical analysis of survey data, he was particularly critical of what he saw as an inappropriate borrowing of the idea of the **variable** from the natural sciences. However, he also accepted the limitations of qualitative research. In an important commentary on W.I. Thomas and Florian Znaniecki's *The Polish Peasant in Europe and America* he conceded that the **life-history** data method of that study could not generate data that would provide a decisive test of the interpretations which the analysts made of the data.

**BODY, SOCIOLOGY OF** In the 1980s a number of sociologists promoted an interest in the embodied nature of the human being as a counter to the over-intellectualised tradition of sociology which tended to concentrate on the self as a mind with ideas, reasons and motives. Talcott Parsons, for example discusses the expressive, ritual and affective aspects of **socialisation** but gives pride of place to values and to a social system based on information. Obviously we inhabit bodies and that corporeal existence produces an interest in sex, in food and in emotions; we take pleasure in the co-presence of other bodies.

bourdieu, pierre (1930–2002)

An acknowledgement of the body has been important in a variety of fields beyond those (such as the sociology of health) that are directly concerned with the body. Much religion, for example, is concerned with the management and discipline of the body. In the field of sociology of deviance too, it has been noted by Foucault and others how much punishment has focused on regulation of the offender's body. Our understanding of forms of social interaction such as conversation are improved by noting the role of physical gestures: 'looking someone in the eye' or tilting the head to show that you are ready to receive communication.

To date, much writing on the body has not gone beyond programmatic assertion and there has been some difficulty (in discussions of **gender**, for example) in reconciling the claim that the body is a vital part of the human person with the sociological axiom that social action is produced by culture interpretations of physical realities rather than directly by the realities themselves.

See **emotions, sociology of**.

**BODY LANGUAGE** The term 'body language' has quickly passed into everyday use and has no strict technical usage in sociology. Generally, it refers to the idea that our bodies are expressive and that people give off signals that may or may not be in line with what they are consciously trying to communicate. There are many lay-person's guides to body language that claim to be able to teach you how to recognise when someone is sexually attracted to you or lying, or both. Recently, **conversation analysis** has turned more of its attention to the co-ordination of talk and gesture, though to date, findings have been relatively limited.

**BOURDIEU, PIERRE (1930–2002)** Probably the leading French sociologist of his

day, Bourdieu contributed both to substantive and methodological debates. Though, like many others, he wrestled with problems of **agency and structure**, his most influential work concerned the sociological significance of culture and **cultural capital**. He investigated in considerable detail the ways in which cultural attainments confer enduring socio-economic advantage and he highlighted the role of taste in entrenching and perpetuating social divisions. His empirical studies, for example in his book *Distinction* (1984), often focused on the meaning and maintenance of high-brow/low-brow distinctions within various cultural fields. According to Bourdieu, acquired patterns of taste, accomplishment and ways of behaving make up one's **habitus**.

**BOURGEOISIE** This French term is used by Marxists to denote the capitalist class: those who monopolise the ownership of the capital. Note that in this sense capital is not confined to ready money but means more generally the resources required for production. In more general usage the term is a synonym for middle class.

See *petite bourgeoisie*.

**BOWLING ALONE** See *social capital*.

**BRAINWASHING** See *conversion*.

**BRAVERMAN, HARRY (1920–76)** Although never a full-time academic, Braverman had a huge influence on the sociology of work. His *Labor and Monopoly Capital* (1974), which he described as an attempt to update Karl Marx's *Capital*, sold over 120,000 copies. His argument that the **de-skilling** of modern work was the result of a deliberate attempt by capitalists to weaken organised labour was a product of 14 years as a factory metal

worker and then a long career in Trotskyite politics.

**BRICOLAGE** This French term denotes the process of transforming the meaning of symbols and objects through novel uses and unexpected arrangements of normally unrelated things. The term was introduced to social science by Claude **Levi-Strauss's** *The Savage Mind* (1967) to describe the practice of creating objects out of whatever came to hand where the structure and outcome were more important than the constituent elements. It later became common in cultural studies to refer to the way in which members of particular social groups create a novel style out of mundane items. An example is the 1980s punk use of safety pins and plastic bin liners in a novel dress style.

**BUREAUCRACY** In general use this denotes a particular form of administration but it was given a more specific meaning by Max **Weber**. Weber's **ideal-type** of bureaucracy was constituted by the following: a high degree of specialisation and a clearly defined division of labour so that for every task there is clearly just one office responsible; a hierarchical structure of authority with unambiguous lines of control but with that control clearly limited; a formal body of rules to govern the business; a clear separation between the resources of the organisation and the private property of its officers; effective record-keeping; long-term employment; and promotion on the basis of merit or seniority. For Weber, the modern bureaucracy had the advantages of efficiency, predictability and equity.

Subsequent work has added a number of important observations. Robert K. **Merton** noted a potential inefficiency in bureaucracy. When officials are too deeply socialised into the culture of bureaucracy, rule-following can itself become the primary purpose and



officials may so lose sight of the goals of the enterprise as inadvertently to subvert them.

Detailed studies of actual bureaucracies drew attention to the fact that bureaucrats could often be creative with the rules and the structure of the organisation. William H. Whyte's (1956) seminal study *Organization Man* amply demonstrated that the formal lines of command could often be by-passed by officials cultivating personal contacts outside the work place, that individual interests and personality could make a considerable difference to how the roles associated with offices were actually performed, and that for all the apparent formality, individuals remained creative. Studies of bureaucracy in relatively poor countries have shown that no number of rules prevents corruption. In effect, officials can threaten clients with a ritualistic attitude to the task (your passport application will take its proper place in an infinitely long queue) or you offer a bribe for the official to expedite your case.

The third major development came from the work of scholars influenced by Harold Garfinkel's **ethnomethodology**. In Weber's view and in the view of those who added qualifications about informality within formal organisations, the rationality or formality of formal organisation was intrinsic: that is, it lay in the nature of the organisation itself. Building on Garfinkel's (1967) seminal 'Good organisational reasons for "bad" clinic records' essay, a number of scholars argued that rationality was actually a property, not of the organisation itself, but of the way that people in the organisation defended or accounted for their actions. David Sudnow's (1965) classic essay 'Normal crimes' makes the point with a study of plea-bargaining in the California court system. In order to keep the justice system working, offenders had to be persuaded to accept a plea-bargain: to avoid trial, the offender would plead guilty to a lesser offence than the one the police thought had been committed. What determined the

choice of substitute charge was not the belief that the new offence had been committed but the fact that it carried a sentence sufficiently shorter than that which the offender would get for the original charge, to make the bargain attractive but not so much shorter that the defender and judge would think an injustice had been done. For example, the standard substitute for certain kinds of sex offence was 'loitering around a school yard' even if, as was usually the case, the offence took place nowhere near a school. Because public defenders and public prosecutors shared a common stock of practical knowledge, they were readily able to produce the required outcomes, by using 'rules of thumb', even though achieving the desired end required disregarding the penal codes. In effect, decisions were made and then the rules of the organisation were used to create the appearance of formal rule-following.

As automation has removed many of the more routine aspects of work, many business leaders have argued that the inefficiencies of the large-scale bureaucracy outweigh its advantages and there has been a move to smaller organisations with flatter structures that allow workers greater autonomy to be creative. However in public administration and government, the Weberian bureaucracy remains the preferred model mainly because its insistence on rule-following and formality is seen as a necessary protection against discrimination and prejudice.

**BUTLER, JUDITH (1956-)** Her (1990) *Gender Trouble* is a significant influence on feminist sociology and on thinking about sexuality. It argues that feminism has made a major mistake in arguing that 'women' form a group with common characteristics and interests and in viewing **patriarchy** in ways which assumed that masculine and feminine cultures would inevitably be built on male and female bodies. For Butler, gender is not a

butler, judith (1956-)

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fixed attribute but an achievement. It is a performance; what you do at particular times, rather than who you are. The cultural configurations of gender with which we are familiar can be disrupted by subversive action; by creating gender trouble through the proliferation of genders and the transgression of received gender conventions.

Butler is a professor of comparative literature and rhetoric. Her work is famously

butler, judith (1956-)

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opaque, so much so that in 1998 she came first in a bad-writing contest run by the journal *Philosophy and Literature*. Furthermore, she does not approach her studies as a social scientist and, stimulating though her ideas may be, they are not supported by any systematic evidence. Like a lot of what passes for theory in cultural studies, her work is largely conjecture and flamboyant calls to action.