Cases of Intervention

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The Great Variety of British Cultural Studies

Edited by

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In the spring of 2011, Professor Jürgen Kramer rounded off his long career in academia with a lecture series on *The Great Variety of British Cultural Studies*. He invited colleagues and friends from over the years to contribute. We, as his former team at Dortmund University, edited this volume on the basis of these papers and gladly dedicate it to him to honour his commitment to British cultural studies.

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INTRODUCTION

CASES OF INTERVENTION

MARIE HOLOGA, CHRISTIAN LENZ,
CYPRIAN PISKUREK AND STEFAN SCHLENSAG

This volume aims at filling a blank space within British cultural studies: we believe that a consideration of the case study is an important contribution to discussions about the future of academic research and the trajectory of our discipline. In presenting a variety of case studies the aim of this book is to suggest different approaches to understanding the interaction between social actors and the ways their actions are embedded and represented in particular historical, social and political contexts. What will hopefully emerge from reading this volume is the recognition of the "interventionist case study" as a useful pragmatic concept. It can be read as a response to the broader discussion of the vital necessity of British cultural studies in academia, schools and its embeddedness in everyday life. By offering the reader a series of practical case studies, *Cases of Intervention* is much more than a collection of single contributions: Each text highlights the dialectics that exist between cultural practices, theoretical frameworks and subjects of analysis.

What is a case study? In general, it could be argued that most of the research conducted in disciplines as diverse as psychology, sociology, political science, urban planning and economics uses the case study as a research paradigm (cf. Yin 1994, 2-3). Famous case studies that are often mentioned in introductions to the methods and methodology of sociology include William Whyte's *Street Corner Society* (1955), Graham Allison's *Essence of Decision* (1971) and *The Roots of Football Hooliganism* edited by Dunning, Murphy and Williams in 1988. The highly idiosyncratic works of Studs Terkel (1970, 1974), Clifford Geertz (1973) and some of the seminal works published by the Contemporary Centre of Cultural Studies in Birmingham (CCCS) such as Stuart Hall's and Tony Jefferson's *Resistance Through Rituals* (1976), however, may also be subsumed under this category. If we consider the emphasis on "lived experience" of the

CCCS's early research projects, we see that the case study method was central to the work in Birmingham (cf. Willis 1977; Hebdige 1979). Yet most of the recent introductory books to (British) cultural studies (among others Lewis 2002, Teske 2002, During 2005, Barker 2007, Giles/Middleton 2008, Skinner 2009) published over the past few years do not discuss the case study as a method interlacing theory and practice. Giles and Middleton merely devote one chapter to a case study and do so without thorough theoretical grounding. Whereas methodologists in sociology offer an array of publications presenting critical reflections on the use of the case study[1], in cultural studies there is a tendency to simply "do" case studies instead. In the following we would like to reconsider the concept of the case study as an apt research tool in British cultural studies and suggest the "interventionist case study" as a method that corresponds to the cornerstones of our discipline.

The Case Study in Sociology and Cultural Studies

Due to the immensely long tradition of its use in sociological research projects, it is not surprising that most of the methodological reflection on the case study has been carried out by sociologists. Here, we find firstly a definition of the term, and secondly, a re-evaluation and critical discussions of major objections against the method. An understanding of these theoretical implications is necessary to see why the case study, notwithstanding its popularity, nevertheless met "with extreme circumspection" in academic discourses (Gerring 2007, 6). A very concise and comprehensive guide for anyone interested in the case study is Robert K. Yin's *Case Study Research, Design and Methods* (1994), originally published in 1984. Yin defines a case study as an empirical research method that "investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident" and subdivides case studies into three types: (i.) exploratory, (ii.) descriptive and (iii.) explanatory studies (1994, 3, 13). Yin criticises the hierarchical tendencies in sociology that assign exploratory case studies exclusively to the stage of investigation during research, descriptive ones to surveying sociological or historical phenomena and explanatory case studies to experiments. He argues that this fixed view of the case study's implementation overlooks that this separation is rather tentative during research. More often than not, case study research resists categorisation and blurs the demarcation lines

[1] For a good overview on classic and traditional case studies, cf. Swanborn 2010.

suggested by this hierarchical view. Reading this as a weakness of the method is a misconception, because the greatest strength of some of the most famous case studies has been their ability to be explanatory *and* descriptive at the same time (cf. ibid., 3). Thus the first objection against the case study is based on its unconventional way of transgressing academic conventions and instead cutting across categorisations.

The second objection against case studies echoes the first one with an emphasis on methodology: the case study has been derided as neither a fully qualified tool for the production of data (in qualitative research) nor a theoretical paradigm of sociology from which theoretical abstractions might be generated (in quantitative research) (cf. Lamnek 1995, 4). Thus, one reason for the marginalised position of case studies is seen in their "hybrid" position between a concrete tool for the production of survey data *and* the "generalisability" of a methodological paradigm. This division points towards the philosophical dilemma of the split between (life) practices and theory. We would like to argue strongly that both objections—firstly, the challenging of academic conventionality and secondly, the reconciliation between theoretical frameworks and the subjects (in the broadest sense) of analysis—make the case study an ideal method for research in cultural studies.

It has been said that cultural studies is "notorious" for "its neglect of considerations of method and methodology" (Gray 2003, 5) and, in comparison to other disciplines in the humanities, has "not paid much attention to the classical questions of research methods and methodology" (Barker 2009, 31). But British cultural studies has always emphasised the importance of cutting across the lines that separate academic disciplines. Whether the boundaries were the result of academic conceit or the (imagined) incompatibility of approaches, researchers felt the need for a more maverick and interdisciplinary work to respond to the fundamental paradigm shifts in the ever increasingly complex and fast-paced post-war "culture". When Richard Hoggart, E.P. Thompson and Raymond Williams—among others—carved out their new understanding of culture in the 1950s, they meant to upset the discipline they were trying to grow out of: English studies. They did so by challenging established and elitist notions about culture and society's access to knowledge in institutions of higher learning. They were trying to reach people who had never set foot inside a university. Williams, for example, famously postulated that "there are no masses […], only ways of seeing people as masses" (1958, 11). The subsequent foundation of the CCCS or the Open University, aiming at non-traditional learners, continued the project in the same vein. In his inaugural address as the director of the CCCS, Hoggart called for

academia to enter into "an active relation with its age" (1971, 259). Under the influence of Hoggart and Williams, sociological approaches merged with hermeneutics of literary studies. As their challenge to the conventional hierarchies of "culture" and academia was complemented by scholars from diverse disciplines, this found its expression in works that are aptly described as case studies. From this perspective the difficult lack of clear-cut academic classification characteristic of case studies corresponded well to the initially unorthodox spirit of cultural studies.

From a methodological point of view the hybrid position of the case study—its location between theory and life practices—matched cultural studies' approach to investigate contemporary cultural phenomena within complex social contexts. Whether projects were inclined towards ethnography, textual representations or reception studies—there is a long-standing tradition to take events, cultural objects, practices or institutions as a particular case and apply a theoretical framework or a combination thereof for analysis. Notwithstanding the plurality and great diversity of cultural studies, there is a strong agreement among scholars that *there are no boundaries* between a phenomenon and its social context. Especially under the leadership of the CCCS's second director, Stuart Hall, the discipline focused on the dialectics of the textual and the social, which may be separated for heuristic reasons only. In contrast to sociology, cultural studies puts a strong focus on the production, reproduction and circulation of meaning. In this respect, cultural studies has developed a unique understanding of what it means to "do" a case study. This is not to say that cultural studies does not work with statistics and data, nor that cultural studies only concentrates on solitary and individual cases: it means that approaches in cultural studies are not appropriately described with methodological terms such as "qualitative" and "quantitative". On the surface level most case studies in cultural studies resemble "qualitative" research carried out in sociology or anthropology. This is especially true for research projects that methodologically choose an ethnographic approach. Ann Gray sums up the criticism that sociologists and anthropologists have launched against such case studies undertaken in cultural studies in terms of shortcomings regarding "scale and breadth" and "depth and duration" (cf. 2003, 15-18). This criticism, however, overlooks that cultural studies attempts to overcome the dichotomy between "qualitative" and "quantitative" by asking questions about the way signifying practices create meaning in all social contexts. It is, in our opinion, this distinctiveness of cultural studies that makes case studies a relevant tool today. Based on Robert K. Yin, we would like to rephrase a

working definition of the case study, reconsidering the arguments discussed so far:

> In cultural studies a case study is a (potentially) interventionist research tool that investigates the production and reproduction of meaning within the dialectics of the textual and social exemplified by contemporary or historical cultural phenomena.

Towards the Interventionist Case Study

Gilbert B. Rodman has poignantly commented that cultural studies in the 21st century holds an "increasingly settled status as an ordinary academic enterprise", which is at cross-purposes with its "inability to intervene productively in the 'real world' contexts where it most hopes to make a difference" (2010, 156). Cultural studies has indeed acquired its place within academia, even though one may safely say that the process is ongoing. Those who fought to establish cultural studies programmes can tell a lot about the difficulties in marking the field for a discipline which boasts about not being confined within disciplines: struggles in British universities about competences with literature departments and debates in Germany about the borders between *Landeskunde* and cultural studies have consequently taken a lot of institutional effort over the years. While, on the one hand, this should be interpreted as a huge success, on the other hand, the discipline has by now been established thoroughly enough to run the risk of becoming self-sufficient:

> It is in this sense that cultural studies has become ordinary: just another undergraduate major, just another academic career choice, just another cog in the university's disciplinary machinery. And so it's not surprising (though it is disappointing) that the benchmarks for cultural studies' success are now more often about reproduction than about invention, more about finding one's place within the system than about remaking that system in significant ways or forging new paths for intellectual and political work. (Rodman 2010, 155)

Rodman's critique should not be misunderstood: the establishment of cultural studies as a central part of university curricula is an utterly beneficial and long overdue thing. It is rather that as a discipline that was built on the very cornerstones of innovation and intervention, cultural studies scholars should now fight even harder against becoming academically complacent. Certainly, opportunities are limited: trying to transfer knowledge into circles outside academia, be it vocational training

(as Williams and Hoggart did) or the public in general, is a difficult undertaking, and in societies which seem to value immediate entertainment cultural studies and people who do it are often just expected to provide light entertainment, because culture is meant to be "something nice".

But that is not what cultural studies is about. Cultural studies should seek to make interventions instead of descriptions, inventions instead of reproductions, put into rather than take out of context. As scholars of the humanities we explain structures and reveal ideologies to change the perception of the same, thus trying to challenge political, social and cultural hegemony where we detect them. It is our aim to thus bring about re-evaluations of the makeup of cultures and societies. Intellectual works that try to lay bare certain ideologies easily run the risk of being equally ideological themselves. Nonetheless, it must be cultural studies' endeavour to use the wide array of methods and theories at our disposal and the endless mass of cases available for investigation to challenge what is easily taken as a given. Winter has explicitly claimed that qualitative analyses in sociology should be oriented towards criticism and intervention (cf. 2011, 89). In the same way that we believe the case study in cultural studies to be an enhancement of sociology's qualitative analyses, we are convinced that our discipline should not lose sight of its endemically interventionist character.

We believe that it does the discipline of cultural studies good if a re-orientation towards its interventionist character takes place in times of increasing social protest against structures of inequality and instability. The various methods and theories applied to the different case studies under scrutiny in this volume are not merely mind games played in the ivory tower; rather, they aim at revealing how cultures work and where intervention would be necessary. This does not imply that the case studies call for direct or indirect action, but it means that we want to raise awareness for marginalised issues and perspectives on certain topics, challenging social and political complacency and established notions of culture. All the editors and the contributors of the individual articles are long-standing university teachers, and are thus aware of the need for pedagogical interventions. The ideal of teaching our students, especially future high school teachers, to become critical thinkers, remains a necessary prerequisite for successful university courses. Although this is certainly true for basically any university subject, we firmly believe that it is even more vital for cultural studies.

Following Williams, we study "lived experience" and "whole way[s] of life", we place much emphasis on the fact that we study cultures in the

plural, and we study the ordinary as well as the extraordinary. What a waste of energy would it be, if intellectuals in cultural studies were *not* to make interventions and teach students the tools with which to make interventions themselves? Simply put: it is the least we can do.

A Book of Cases

As a first case study in this volume, **Jürgen Kramer**'s article analyses the emergence of the iconic British cup of tea (with sugar) as a cultural product resulting from complex imperial, economic and social power-relations, and he interprets these from a cultural-materialist point of view. As soon as tea and sugar were introduced to the British Isles for mass consumption in the 17th century, a complex system of meanings and practices evolved around the two colonial products: from global commercial relations like the notorious triangular trade to the domestic way tea was thought to be properly prepared, served and drunk.

Bernd Lenz takes a closer look at the British monarchy. Since the Early Modern Age, more than twenty kings and queens have shaped the country's appearance and history and are strongly intertwined with national identity. And thus, they make good subjects for filmic adaptations. Lenz considers the importance of heritage movies and their strong focus on representations and reconstructions of real people and events in the medium of film. He uses exemplary films in order to analyse the dichotomy between the historical dimension and both narratological and filmic changes, as well as setting apart the historical film from the costume drama. Using *The Private Life of Henry VIII* (1933), *The Young Victoria* (2009) and *The Queen* (2006), Lenz discusses whether public figures can actually claim a private life as well as the appeal of male and female rulers to movie makers and their stressing of gender and personal issues.

Remembering is crucial for a society because it is a social act. This is the starting point for **Joachim Schwend**, who establishes that sites of memory possess a myth-making productivity, for memory attaches meaning to a past event by placing it in a framework. Monuments, which are erected to commemorate, thus provide an interface between the past and the future by being located in the present. Schwend chooses the National Memorial Arboretum as his case study to show how communities stabilise themselves by creating monuments and engaging with them. The National Memorial Arboretum holds a special place as it encompasses almost 200 individual sites of memory, all of which commemorate soldiers and civilians who have been involved in a military conflict. Yet, this memorial is not limited to the British people alone, and Schwend takes this

as a point of analysis. He proposes that sites of memory are indeed also sites of hegemonic power, as memorials—and also photographs, (war) heroes and myths—are used to construct a certain memory, canon and identity by representing and creating meaning.

British cultural studies is deeply rooted in the critiques of founding figures like Raymond Williams, Richard Hoggart and Stuart Hall. **Marie Hologa** and **Cyprian Piskurek**'s contribution takes up one of these influential concepts, i.e. Williams's "structure of feeling". Williams reformulated this term again and again, trying to establish a terminology of generational change and tradition in how cultures feel and how such feeling is structured. According to the authors, it is especially his emphasis on dominant, residual and emergent social formations within such structures of feeling which can still serve as a fruitful approach for a contemporary case study, namely on British millennium architecture. Several particular buildings—including the "Gherkin" in London and the new Scottish Parliament in Edinburgh—as well as the absence of new buildings in other sectors are thereby examined as cultural expressions of the umbrella term prevalent at around the turn of the millennium: "Cool Britannia".

Introducing the disciplinary interfaces as well as demarcations of ethnography and British cultural studies, **Claudia Sternberg's** article gives a brief overview of the history of ethnography in the UK and relates it to two different ethnographic projects: case studies that involve the observation of particular practices of social interaction in contemporary Britain and Germany. Firstly, she examines the cultural dynamics of the custom among unacquainted black people to greet each other in the public sphere—acknowledging each others' presence and "otherness" in a predominantly white Europe—with the help of semi-structured interviews she conducted. Secondly, Sternberg describes interdisciplinary collaborations in a series of upcoming projects (Legacies of War) that deal with contemporary memory culture relating to World War I. She pays special attention to a project focused on folk music songs and their transmission from generation to generation.

Christian Lenz applies a spatial reading to Helen Fielding's 1996 novel *Bridget Jones's Diary*, applying prominent concepts in cultural geography to examine the representation of single men's and women's lives in London and how Bridget Jones's search for Mr Right literally *takes place* in this urban environment, claiming geographical spaces within the metropolis. Looking at locales ranging from a character's home up to the representation of a district within the British capital, the essay analyses how characters inhabit and interact with space. Addressing

different usages of spaces as well as how one can deduce romantic compatibility from one's abode is in the focus and it shows applicability of a rather "physical" concept to a fictitious narrative, thereby features as a significant aspect of the novel in catering for the mainly female audience's response of "This is me!", identifying themselves with the shortcomings and petty failures in Bridget's life, especially in her domestic sphere.

Stefan Schlensag—in yet a different take on the Bridget Jones-phenomenon—applies a Marxist perspective to the novel and its film adaptation, criticising the conspicuous absence of issues of social and economic status. He identifies a commodified expression of the neoliberal discourse of a "classless society", prevalent in British political rhetoric of the 1990s. In doing so, he also calls for a renaissance of Marxist theory and the analytical category of class in British cultural studies, which he sees under threat by the prevalent identity politics of postmodernism.

Starting with a rather recent comment by Carol Thatcher that made the BBC gasp, **Susanne Reichl** explains the history of the golliwog. What began as a minor character in Florence Upton's 1895 children's book became a bone of contention when Thatcher compared a coloured sportsman to the golliwog: a figure that appears to be a gross stereotype of a black man. Reichl wonders whether the use of the golliwog's name and image must be considered racist and delves deep into a discussion about meaning, signification and Stuart Hall's concept of articulation. Giving an introduction to Upton's originally valuable and likeable minor character, who became so famous with kids that it was promoted to experience its own adventures, the author looks into the early signs and possibilities of racism and imperialist ideology. She continues to trace the golliwog throughout the 20th century—considering stereotypes and minstrel shows, the golliwog's appearance as a marketing mascot, as a commodity and as a character in other children's literature—and discusses the potential for de- and re-articulation.

A prominent and important field of cultural studies is that of postcolonial studies. **Ellen Grünkemeier** explains the ties and connections between these areas of study in her essay and explains that they share an interest in analysing power structures in all forms of cultural expression. Postcolonial studies is especially concerned with the relationship(s) between (former) coloniser and colonised. Many traces of these relationships can still be found and contested. The repercussions of colonisation remain ever present, even if the colonised have gained independence. Grünkemeier elects South Africa as the country she will focus on, given its special status among the African states due to apartheid and the hopes that surrounded the first democratic elections in 1994. Her case study is about

the work of political cartoonist Zapiro, who is well known in South Africa because his cartoons deal with important events in the country's—very present—history, which are widely circulated in the national newspapers. Four of his cartoons constitute the core of her case study, and for each she gives a brief socio-political context before analysing them more closely. These cartoons deal with the "Rainbow Nation" and its outcome, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, xenophobia, apartheid as well as the 2010 World Cup. Together, they present a more diversified picture of a country that has tried to re-invent itself so many times.

New trends in drama are the focus of **Bernhard Klein's** essay. He looks at verbatim theatre, which fuses a traditional literary genre with real life events and their reports. Verbatim theatre aims for actuality and a new creative form of documenting historical and historic events located in the continuing present rather than the past. It has the potential for political intervention in the present, with its proximity to journalism as well as legal and forensic inquiry. Klein gives a history of the relatively new tradition of verbatim theatre, comparing it to German documentary drama, and explains the major developments in this category along with its most important entries. He narrows his focus on David Hare, a strong believer in the possibility of the oft word-for-word quoted plays, whom Klein considers to be one of the dramatic form's key advocates. "What really happened" is a mantra here, as Hare and his fellow verbatim theatre "compositeurs" use pre-recordings or transcribed eye-witness accounts to re-create specifically British or globally relevant pieces. Focusing on three of Hare's plays, *The Permanent Way*, *Stuff Happens* and *The Power of Yes*, Klein ponders questions regarding the advantages, but also the problems, of Hare's chosen topics and techniques. He aims to explain the importance of this new form of drama by applying Jean Baudrillard's thoughts to the theoretical implications of verbatim theatre.

Claus-Ulrich Viol chooses a very recent British phenomenon as his case study: the growing number of CCTV cameras in Britain and the development of a surveillance society. It is estimated that each individual is caught on camera about 300 times a day, yet CCTV has not helped to prevent crime or further its detection. Viol thus addresses the question of why Britain still puts so much energy, hope and also money into this project. In order to near in on an explanation, he chooses a threefold approach. In the first step he considers the material interests that encourage the constant accumulation and updating of cameras. He ponders over the business relationship local governments have struck with private security companies using a neo-Marxist approach. The increasing privatisation of public space is in focus as well as the paradox that the

police have the images at their disposal but no control over *what* the camera actually looks at. The second approach uses a constructionist point of view and deliberates the question of national identity: why does a nation which is proud of its peoples' freedom as well as its unrestricted government choose to be watched by a network of artificial eyes? Finally, Viol chooses a psychoanalytical take and applies Slavoj Žižek's ideas. With the philosopher's help he argues that the subject who is filmed considers freedom a burden and needs to be watched in order to feel validated.

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CHAPTER ONE

TEA & SUGAR: ON THE ORIGINS AND EFFECTS OF A CONSUMING BRITISH PASSION

JÜRGEN KRAMER

I.

When Rudyard Kipling wrote his famously pessimistic lines "*Oh, East is East, and West is West, and never the twain shall meet*" (1995, 190), he had people and their culturally different mentalities in mind. What he neglected to mention was what these people, be they conquerors or refugees, settlers or slaves, explorers or botanists, brought with them: animals, plants and minerals from the different regions of the world. These imports also had to adapt, not only to their new surroundings, but also to each other, very often entering into new combinations, undergoing decisive transformations and sometimes effectively winning a new quality. It seems almost as if flora and fauna had more luck and success in these processes of mutual adaptation than human beings. Think, for example, of the *potato*, a humble root from the Andes, unknown in Europe before the Renaissance. Francis Drake, returning from his circumnavigation of the world (1577-1580), may have been the one to introduce the potato to England. Although, at first, the crop was only grown in small garden plots, it was gradually accepted for large-scale cultivation. With the fight against famines in the second half of the eighteenth century, the potato proved even more relevant. By the nineteenth century it had become a staple crop in the whole of Northern and Eastern Europe because it was cheap, did not easily spoil and, crucially, it readily stilled hunger. As such it became a central diet component for agricultural labourers and industrial workers alike. The disaster of the Irish famine (1845-1852), when a plant disease led to serious crop failure, illustrated the population's dependency on a crop, which was unknown three centuries previously, for survival.

Similar examples of plant transfer abound: besides the potato, maize, beans and squash (the "three sisters" planted by Native Americans) as well as paprika (sweet pepper), the tomato, pineapple, vanilla, tobacco and cocoa were transferred from the Americas to Europe, Asia and Africa, while the banana, date palm and mango as well as coffee and sugar cane were taken into the opposite direction (cf. Wendt 2007, 165; Beinart and Middleton 2004). From these many available examples, I have decided on a case study of the proverbial cup of tea because of its composite nature (tea, sugar and, not to forget, "china" or porcelain), its intricate international history (involving the Caribbean, Africa, China, India and Britain) as well as its complex development into a central cultural icon of Britishness. I take my lead from a short remark by Stuart Hall:

> People like me who came to England in the 1950s have been there for centuries; symbolically, we have been there for centuries. I was coming home. I am the sugar at the bottom of the English cup of tea. I am the sweet tooth, the sugar plantations that rotted generations of English children's teeth. There are thousands of others beside me that are, you know, the cup of tea itself. Because they don't grow it in Lancashire, you know. Not a single tea plantation exists within the United Kingdom. This is the symbolization of English identity—I mean, what does anybody in the world know about an English person except that they can't get through the day without a cup of tea? (1991, 48-49)

In the following, I would like to describe and analyse when and why sugar (II) and tea (III) were introduced into Britain, how the British developed a taste for them and acquired both products in sufficient quantities for mass consumption and, finally, the meaning(s) sugar and tea (separately and in their particular combination) acquired in the context of British culture (IV). As a cultural-materialist historian I intend to reconstruct, i.e. describe and interpret, the past as it is accessible to me in various primary sources (economic, political or cultural by nature) and their interpretations. My reconstruction of the tea-and-sugar nexus does not aspire to form a "grand narrative" but, rather, a number of overlapping cultural contexts (cf. below), which permit contradictions and open-endedness. The concept of culture employed is informed by the following five meanings: culture as "cultivating the land, crops, animals", as "the cultivation of the mind", as "a general process of social development; culture as a universal process", as "the meanings, values, ways of life […] shared by particular nations, groups, classes, periods" and as "the practices which produce meaning" (Bocock 1992, 234). While these meanings have evolved historically and in their succession document a complex process of differentiation and

refinement, their continued relevance for the processes I try to describe and analyse is undiminished. Inevitably, the production of historical knowledge is political—which is why the different meanings of culture will be re-considered in the final section (V) with particular emphasis on the downsides of the cultural processes described before.[1]

II.

While the stereotypical statement "There's nothing like a nice cup of tea" signals the dominant position of tea, the people of the British Isles tasted sugar before they ever tasted tea (cf. Galloway 2000, 442). The production of crystal *sugar* was first mentioned in Sanskrit texts (around 500 BC), which indicates that it may have taken place in northern India. From there the technique spread eastward to the south of China and westward to Persia, finally reaching the Mediterranean roughly one thousand years later. While in the Chinese cuisine, sugar became just one of a whole range of sweeteners, in the West it quickly dominated and eventually replaced its competitors. As the sugarcane plant (*Saccharum officinarum*) was "notoriously delicate, disease prone, and resource hungry during cultivation" (Mar 2007, 1064), its establishment as an industry on the southern coast of the Mediterranean (promoted by the Arabs) and its further migration westward to the Canary and Cape Verde islands took another 800 years. Furthermore, the lack of sufficient water (for irrigation but also as a physical power source for the mills) and of suitable labour power allowed the production of small quantities only, so that sugar remained a medicinal and, for the wealthy, a luxury product until early modern times.

The great change came after Europe's westward expansion with "the transfer of the industry" (Galloway 2000, 443) to the Caribbean islands and Brazil, where the necessary conditions for the growth of sugarcane could be created by harnessing natural resources to technical inventions and a particular employment of labour power. While "extensive, fertile lands near navigable coasts and rivers, with a deep water port nearby to facilitate the movement of large bulky cargos" as well as "abundant timber reserves for construction and firewood—the latter used for the extensive boiling, and eventually the steam power, necessary for the refining

[1] For a critically informative study of the cultural meaning of tea in 18th-century Britain, analysing the discourses of medicine, alterity (otherness), gender, luxury as well as paying particular attention to the various symbolic dimensions of tea, cf. Fraund 2010.

process" were naturally available, "foodstuffs" for the labourers could be grown alongside the sugarcane (Inglis 2007, 1067). However, "tools and implements" had to be imported—as had "a continuing supply of cheap labor" (ibid.). The latter consisted of African slaves, who were forced to replace the indigenous people (decimated by 90 per cent in the first century after the arrival of the Europeans [cf. Reynolds 1985, 59]) and to complement the small number of poor European whites who had migrated to the "new world" as indentured servants, "redemptioners" or convicts.

Figures vary, but conservative estimates (cf. Abaka 2007; Mar 2007, 1066) reckon that between 8 and 10 million Africans were transported to the Americas between the mid-seventeenth and the mid-nineteenth century; others speak of 12 million (cf. Manning 1994, 101; Richardson 1998). As such, the slave trade quickly became an indispensable part of the colonial powers' Atlantic trading system (cf. Kramer 2007, 125-128). Their economic goals were initially determined by the mercantilist idea that the world's resources were limited and that every nation did well if it tried to obtain as much of them as possible. They aimed at exploiting their colonies by (i) extracting precious minerals (gold, silver and, later, diamonds); (ii) growing raw materials (sugar, tobacco, cotton, coffee, cocoa etc.), which could be refined in the mother country and re-exported; and (iii) excluding other nations from trading with these colonies. Because of the dependence of the colony on the mother country, the latter could be sure to acquire the colony's raw materials at a cheap price and to sell goods produced at home at a favourable price in the colony. The main axis on which this expansion turned was the so-called *triangular trade*: a triangle of trading relations, which in the course of time grew more and more complex and intensive. From Europe manufactured goods (such as cloth, iron, rum and guns) were exported to Africa in order to be profitably exchanged against slaves, who were sold in the Americas. The empty ships were then loaded with raw materials (such as sugar, cotton and tobacco), which were processed and consumed in Britain or re-exported to the European continent. On all three voyages profits were made which flowed into the European commercial centres. As an influential Bristol merchant stated:

> Africa supplied the workers "whereby our Plantations are improved, and 'tis by their Labours such great Quantities of *Sugar, Tobacco, Cotton, Ginger*, and *Indigo* are raised, which being bulky Commodities imploy great Numbers of our Ships for their transporting hither, and the greater number of Ships imploys the greater number of Handecraft Trades at home, spends more of our Product and Manufactures, and makes more

> Saylors, who are maintained by separate Imploy" (qtd. in Sheridan 1998, 399).

African slaves were bought and sold almost everywhere on the West African coast between Senegambia and Angola. Of the 8 to 12 million Africans taken across the Atlantic, only 80 to 90 per cent reached their destinations; the others died (mostly because of illnesses) on the "Middle Passage". The average mortality rate of 20 to 25 per cent before 1700 fell to 15 per cent in the eighteenth century and to 10 per cent in the nineteenth century. Eighteenth-century Britain was the leading slave-trading nation. Its share was 41.3 per cent—almost as much as the other slave-trading nations (Portugal 29.3, France 19.2, the Netherlands 5.7, British North America/USA 3.2, Denmark 1.2, Sweden and Brandenburg 0.1 per cent) together (cf. Wirz 1984, 25; Richardson 1998, 440). Early estimates of the profits (16 to 30 per cent) were too high: a more recent estimate ended up with an average profit of 8-10 per cent (cf. Richardson 1998, 460). This was definitely more than could be made in agriculture at home—where 3.5 per cent was regarded as normal—but only slightly more than could be achieved in other spheres of commerce.

When the slave ships arrived in the Americas, the slaves were sold either to someone who had bought them in advance, or they were sold by public auction, or in a "scramble". (In the latter the slaves up for sale were kept in a corral and their prospective buyers were allowed to rush in and simply grab whomever they wanted to buy.) The slaves, who usually came from different regions of Africa, were "seasoned" and immediately put to work. Producing sugar was hard, labour-intensive and backbreaking work (cf. Mintz 1985, 26). It was done on plantations, large landholdings supervised by a small white planter class that employed forced labourers: African slaves at first and, after the abolition of slavery in the British Empire in the 1830s, indentured labourers from the Indian subcontinent and China.[2] The typical sugar planter was "at once landlord, farmer, manufacturer, and merchant" (Sheridan 1998, 404). He had to handle a

[2] "Historically, sugar plantations implied large labor inputs under a regime of discipline that usually implied coercion, which sometimes took the form of slavery. In many ways, in its pure form, plantation organization seemed to foreshadow the modern factory. It was operated under a single authority, its labor was regimented and regularized, in part by the nature of the productive process—planting, growing, cutting, milling, cooking, cooling, crystallizing, sorting, packing, shipping—in part by the capacities and demands of the existing technology, and in some measure by social habits and expectations of command" (Schwartz 2004b, 3).

mixed work force (of subordinate whites and black slaves) whose imbalance grew over the years: the overall "ratio of whites to blacks" (Sheridan 1998, 400) in the British West Indian colonies rose from 1:3.7 in 1700, to 1:5.9 in 1748, and finally to 1:11.7 in 1815 (cf. ibid.; Ward 1998, 433).

The sugar plantations of the Caribbean islands were "both farms and factories" because "ripe canes had to be cut and crushed and the cane-juice boiled within twenty-four to forty-eight hours to prevent fermentation and spoilage" (Sheridan 1998, 395). The resulting "sludge [was] centrifuged to separate the brown sugar crystals from the liquid molasses" (Inglis 2007, 1068). While the sugar mills had to be near the fields where the cane was grown in order to prevent spoilage, further refining processes, in which transparent or white sugar was produced through an additional round of melting, filtering, boiling and drying (cf. ibid.), were located closer to the markets where the sugar was to be consumed or re-exported, for example in Britain.

The growth of European consumption of sugar occurred in distinct stages: initially regarded as one of the "drugs of the 'Orient'" (Stols 2004, 275), it became a luxury item of the aristocracies and merchant princes of the Renaissance. Sugar sculptures were constructed for sumptuous court and wedding banquets in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries; under Elizabeth and the early Stuarts sugar banquets turned into "standard element[s] in court entertainment" (ibid., 239). During the course of the seventeenth century, sugar gradually became "an entirely separate and important foodstuff, a veritable colonial commodity" (ibid., 240), not least because of its "use in the conserving of fruits and jam making" (ibid.). The greatest influence, however, was exercised by the introduction of three hot beverages: coffee, tea and cocoa (cf. III below). In 1700, 22,017 tons of sugar were exported from the British West Indies to England and Wales. By 1748 the figure had risen to 41,425 tons (cf. Sheridan 1998, 400) and by 1815 to 164,859 tons (cf. Ward 1998, 429). There is no doubt that this development was either cause or effect—or both—of a great change in European eating and drinking habits.

III.

"Tea, a drink made from the leaves and buds of the shrub *Camellia sinensis*, is the most culturally and economically significant nonalcoholic beverage in the world" (Weinberger and Comer 2000, 712). Its dietary advantages were immediately clear to seventeenth-century Europeans: tea could plausibly serve as a substitute for beer (which had been the main

drink at all meals for ages), it was made with boiling water (whose heat killed off water-borne diseases) and—with its "mild amount of caffeine"—it was a "tasty, healthy source of quick energy" (Neumann 2007, 1072).[3] In the British context, tea was first mentioned as "chaw" in a letter by an English sea captain in 1597; it was "first announced for sale at a London coffeehouse" (Weisburger and Comer 2000, 716) in the 1650s.

Although the "true origins of tea are unknown" (ibid., 713), when it was introduced to Europe it had to be imported from China. But the Chinese were not easy to deal with. When the Europeans discovered the use and usefulness of *coffee* and *cocoa* for themselves, they quickly took over not only the distribution (trade) of them, but also their production by transferring the plants to suitably larger and more fertile lands under their rule or influence: for example, the coffee plants from the Near East to Central and South America, South East Asia and, later, Africa and the cocoa trees from Central America to the West Indies and the Philippines. The Chinese, however, "kept the secrets of tea growing and processing to themselves", to such an extent that it was not before the nineteenth century that their European customers learnt that "black and green tea came from the same plant" (ibid., 714). In 1848, after the first serious military encounter between Britain and China and the latter's defeat (cf. below), a Scottish botanist named Robert Fortune entered the country disguised as a Chinese merchant and stole the secrets of tea horticulture and manufacturing. Shortly afterwards, Chinese tea was planted in India and, somewhat later, in Ceylon (today's Sri Lanka).

The Chinese did not only closely guard their highly coveted export, they were also "difficult" to trade with because there were not many goods they would accept in trade. While the British (as well as the other Europeans and the Americans) demanded silk, tea and—as a cultural supplement to "handle" the latter—porcelain ("china"!), the Chinese were anything but keen on British (or other European) products because they regarded them as inferior to their own. Thus, when British demand for tea rose, a serious balance-of-payment problem developed. Tea exports from Canton to Britain soared: from a few hundred pounds in the 1690s, to 200,000 lbs. in 1717, 3 million lbs. in 1757 and 12 million lbs. in 1772 (cf. Connors 1998, 259). In the 1790s, British tea imports averaged close to 20

[3] Similarly, cocoa contains no more than a "mild amount of caffeine", while the amount in coffee is much higher: "One kilogram of tea makes about 440 cups, whereas the same amount of coffee makes about 88 […]" (Weisburger & Comer 2000, 719).

million lbs. per year (cf. Bowen 1998, 534-535).[4] While these figures include re-exports, the following reflect imports retained for home consumption: roughly, 23 million lbs. in 1801, 53 million lbs. in 1851 (cf. Forrest 1973, 285). From the mid-nineteenth century onwards, when tea imports continued to grow—259 million lbs. in 1901, 450 million lbs. in 1951 (cf. ibid.)—Britain increasingly acquired them from producers in their colonies (India, Ceylon).

It has been reckoned that—because of the growing European demand for tea—between "1752 and 1800, a net 105 million silver dollars (approximately £26.25 million) flowed into China" (Lovell 2011, 2). However, "between 1808 and 1856, 384 million travelled in the opposite direction" (ibid.). The reason for this reversal was that the British had finally hit on a commodity that could be sold to the Chinese: *opium*. Its import to China had been illegal since 1729, but it had always been produced in the country itself. When the British offered opium of a better quality from the Indian subcontinent (Bengal, Bihar, Orissa) in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, many Chinese—somewhere between one and ten per cent of the population (cf. Wakeman 1978, 178)—made opium-smoking their own (as, *mutatis mutandis*, many British had made tea-drinking their own). And although the Chinese government, in an attempt to curb the abuse, made the smoking of opium a crime in 1796, many of its subjects regarded it as "a chic post-prandial; an essential lubricant of the sing-song (prostitute) trade, a must-have hospitality item for all self-respecting hosts; a favourite distraction from the pressures of court life for the emperor and his household" (Lovell 2011, 23). Although it may sound frivolous, many Chinese "smoked for as many reasons as Europeans consumed alcohol and tobacco: for show; for companionship; to relieve boredom and pain. Some smoked their lives and estates away; others never got past their first puff; others again limited their doses to a daily post-prandial" (ibid., 35). There can be no doubt: "the eighteenth-century British addiction to tea matched that of opium users" in China (Connors 1998, 259):

> From 1800 to 1818, the average annual [import] traffic held steady at around 4,000 chests (each chest containing around 140 pounds of opium); by 1831, it was nearing 20,000. After 1833, when the Free Trade lobby terminated the East India Company's monopoly on the tea trade, the market was flooded by private merchants hungry for tea and profits.

[4] The East India Company markedly dominated the tea export from China: between 1778 and 1784 it carried 36% of it, between 1785 and 1791 63% and between 1814 and 1820 76% (cf. Menninger 2004, 200).

> Opium—in ever greater quantities—was the barter. By the close of the decade, sales had more than doubled again. (Lovell 2011, 2-3)

In the mid-eighteen-fifties the figure had risen to 70,000 chests; by the 1880s it was 90,000 chests (cf. Balfour 1968, III, 34).

Thus, another *triangular trade* had been set up: finished products, such as Lancashire cotton after the destruction of the Bengal cotton industry, were exported from Britain to India; there, opium was produced and exported to China which, in turn, exported tea to Britain. On each of its three legs, profits were made: by the entrepreneurs, the merchants and the government(s), including the Chinese, who demanded tribute from the European traders. The British Indian income from the *opium* monopoly (secured by the East India Company in 1773) was obtained "by two principal means, namely, by a system of allowing the cultivation of the poppy by the natives of British India on account of the Government,[5] and by the impost of a heavy duty on opium grown and manufactured in foreign states, but brought in transit to a British port for exportation" (Balfour 1968, III, 38). Opium, which in the last quarter of the eighteenth century could be produced for 200 rupees a chest, achieved gross profits of 200 to 400 per cent (cf. Connors 1998, 256). Opium revenues accounted for "5.2 per cent in 1792, 7 per cent in 1812, 10 per cent in 1822 and as much as 20 per cent in 1842" (Connors 1998, 259; cf. Lovell 2011, 251) of British India's total revenue. When the Chinese government eventually privileged moral concern over economic interest and tried to stop the trade by confiscating and destroying 20,000 chests worth £2 million or $9 million (cf. Wakeman 1978, 188) in May 1839, this led to the first (of two) Anglo-Chinese wars, also called Opium Wars (1839-42, 1856-60). Both ended in defeats for the Chinese, who had to pay high indemnities and sign "unequal treaties", which opened up the country to international trade. While the East India Company made relatively little money from the *tea*

[5] "The East India Company did not publicly dirty its hands by bringing the drug to China. It commissioned and managed plantations of opium poppies across hundreds of thousands of Indian acres. It took care of the processing […]. Finally, it oversaw the packing of the drug into mango-wood chests, its shipping to Calcutta, and auctioning off. At that moment, the Company washed its hands of it, letting private merchants sail for the Chinese coast, where they anchored off the island of Lintin, at the mouth of the Pearl River. Eager Chinese wholesalers would then use silver to buy certificates from private trading offices in Canton and exchange them for opium; this silver would in turn secure teas and silks for the English market" (Lovell 2011, 3).

trade itself, "by the 1830s the British government was obtaining 10 per cent of its revenue from the tea taxes" (Wakeman 1978, 166).[6]

The only people who did not profit were those who cultivated tea and opium in the fields and processed them in the factories. Theirs was—like in sugarcane cultivation and production—hard, predominantly manual (i.e. labour intensive) work. Both crops also grew on (mostly mono-cultural) plantations, worked by men and women whose formal status, perhaps, was not that of a slave, but whose actual way of working closely resembled forced labour. In opium cultivation, smallholders and their entire families were put to work. More often than not, they had to be forced by the entrepreneurs to cultivate poppies because, for the peasants, it would have been more profitable to produce crops for the local markets (cf. Tanner 2001, 232). In tea cultivation, the work of the "coolies"—migrant workers hired with dubious contracts and for minimal wages—was segregated by gender: while the women did the plucking of the tea leaves, the men were responsible for the trimming and weeding of the tea bushes as well as the further processing of the leaves (cf. Rothermund 2001, 175).

IV.

Taking tea, usually several times a day, has not just been a habit of most Britons, but a way of life for about three and a half centuries. In the second half of the seventeenth century and, with increasing rapidity, in the eighteenth century most European societies embraced "a new lifestyle in which tea, coffee, chocolate and tobacco together with sugar, the fruits of overseas expansion and commercial capitalism, played a critical cultural role" (Goodman 2007, 121). But *why* did Europeans consume these colonial goods in their various combinations in greater quantities than ever before? Apparently, there is *not one* answer to this question. Rather, as Woodruff D. Smith has argued, one can describe "several *cultural contexts* within which tea and sugar separately, and then tea and sugar together, seem to have had meaning in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries" (1992, 261). The term "cultural context" covers "an assembly of cultural traits (social structures, customary behaviours, ideas, words, and material

[6] High taxes on tea precipitated the American Revolutionary War (1775-1783). The British parliament had authorised the East India Company to reduce its amassed surplus by carrying huge amounts of dutied tea to the ports of New England. On 16 December 1773 a group of about fifty men, disguised as Native Americans, boarded three ships, broke open some 340 chests of tea, dumped their contents into the water and thereby destroyed cargo worth about £10,000 (cf. Labaree 1964).