

## Intersubjectivities and Popular Culture: An Introduction

### Bakhtin and Beyond

What does it mean to move into the beyond of a thinker like Mikhail Bakhtin, whose ideas might be seen as already overextended? What particular move does the beyond indicate in an age so preoccupied with the temporality of the *post* and the *after* that every day seems to see the announcement of yet another death?<sup>1</sup> My aim in invoking a beyond to Bakhtin is less to declare his work obsolete than to enable it to live on, to make it speak to us anew. In other words, I seek to provide it with an afterlife, a term that itself paradoxically denotes not a leaving behind of life, but its continuation in a different but still recognizable form. The beyond thus signifies a taking of the past into the future. Hence, I have chosen the formulation “Bakhtin and Beyond” in preference to “Beyond Bakhtin”: The coordinating conjunction joins together two terms of equal status, establishing a reciprocal relation. Although in this particular case, the relation clearly contains some element of progression or succession, it does not allow the second term to completely erase the first. Both terms are left standing, made to work together.

I challenge Bakhtin to move into his beyond by staging a confrontation between his ideas and a selection of contemporary popular cultural artifacts that bring his ideas into the present and test their continuing relevance in relation to pressing social, cultural, and theoretical questions concerning intersubjectivity, our living with the other. The selected objects

lie squarely outside Bakhtin's own sphere of interest—they include film and television, on which he never wrote—and may appear somewhat eclectic even to the present reader: two recent, highly popular television series obsessed with sexuality (*Sex and the City*, *Queer as Folk*); two rather mediocre and by now largely forgotten films about characters looking for a voice (*Nell*, *Flawless*); and a street festival that seems to have outgrown its controversial origins (London's Notting Hill Carnival). Each of these objects, however, acts as a provocation to one or more of Bakhtin's concepts, exposing where they need to be rethought—taken into their own beyond. Each object makes a crucial theoretical point bearing on the threefold focus of this book: Bakhtin and what lies beyond his thought, intersubjectivities, and popular culture. In this introduction, I deal with each of these aspects in turn, setting out my motivations and strategies for bringing them together in a single volume.

First, however, I want to note that all three elements join in my approach, which is that of *cultural analysis*. Cultural analysis, as a distinct analytical approach for studying cultural objects, is most closely associated with the work of Mieke Bal and the Amsterdam School for Cultural Analysis, within which this work is situated.<sup>2</sup> Jonathan Culler has outlined its difference from the more familiar discipline of cultural studies, arguing that whereas cultural studies focuses almost exclusively on present popular culture and is characterized by its alignment with *theory* (in particular Foucauldian structuralism), cultural analysis brings together past and present, popular and high culture, and defines itself in terms of its method, as a “particular kind of theoretical engagement” (1999: 345).

In her introduction to *The Practice of Cultural Analysis*, Bal defines cultural analysis as an interdisciplinary, self-reflexive practice that “seeks to understand the past as *part of* the present” (1999a: 1). Cultural analysis takes cultural objects and theories from the past, not excluding however very recent ones, and it examines their function in the present as part of the contemporary cultural memory of which the cultural analyst partakes. This means that the cultural analyst is personally implicated in her work: her situatedness in a specific present is actively acknowledged within the analysis. The move from the past to the present, moreover, takes the objects and theories that form the subject of cultural analysis beyond themselves and introduces them to change. Thus, if my aim is to examine, through cultural analysis, the interplay between the work of Bakhtin and

a series of cultural objects with regard to the problem of intersubjective identity construction, both the theory and the objects need to be *present-ed* (blending presentation and being made present) in an active gesture that propels them into their beyond, thus causing them to exceed their previous contexts. The *beyond* of my title, therefore, is symptomatic of the present-ing effect of cultural analysis as a methodology.

In relation to its objects, cultural analysis adopts the technique of close reading—not in the New Critical sense, which “claimed some sort of ‘purity’ from the subject of analysis” (Bal 1999b: 137), but rather as an active interaction or confrontation with the cultural object where this object is understood as open to question and as questioning in turn the theories the cultural analyst brings to bear on it. The close readings performed by the cultural analyst do not stay inside the text; as indicated above, they transport the text to a present context, taking the interplay between the text and this new context as a serious theoretical moment. At the same time, cultural analysis retains close reading’s attention to detail, focusing particularly on textual or visual details that resist a comfortable fit with the analysis in progress. Such details not only prompt a novel interpretation of the object, but also elicit a rereading of the theoretical framework in which the analysis places itself. In preference to having theory speak about the object, cultural analysis has the object speaking back to theory. Bal terms such interaction the “empowerment of the object” (2002: 10). It is the move by which the object “from subject matter becomes subject, participating in the construction of theoretical views” (Bal 1999a: 13). In this way, the practice of cultural analysis turns the cultural object into a theoretical object, an object that *does* theory. Theory and object involve each other in a productive relationship of reciprocal intersubjectivity. The cultural analyst, in turn, takes up an intersubjective stance in relation to this interaction, inserting herself into the exchange as an interlocutor. The model of interaction cultural analysis establishes is akin to the privileged form of intersubjective communication Bakhtin theorizes as dialogism, which I discuss in Chapter 4. This affinity renders the association of Bakhtin’s work with the practice of cultural analysis particularly auspicious.

Cultural analysis is also salient for my present investigation because it amounts to a “concept-based methodology” (Bal 2002: 5). Given that I propose to examine the vigor of a number of Bakhtin’s theoretical concepts in relation to the popular cultural construction of intersubjective

identities, a concept-based approach is expedient. I elaborate on my approach to Bakhtin's concepts below. Here, it suffices to say that in dealing with each of these concepts I will heed Bal's maxim that "no concept is meaningful for cultural analysis unless it helps us to understand the object better *on its*—the object's—*own terms*" (2002: 8). Conversely, the object should enlighten the concept, establishing, again, an intersubjective movement of dialogic interaction. I construe my concepts as dynamic and flexible in their encounters with different objects, in their function across the work of different theorists, and in their elaboration by Bakhtin himself. But I shall also be careful to delineate their specificity. Concepts travel, to borrow Bal's central metaphor, but these travels need to be scrupulously sign-posted in order to prevent concepts from becoming hazy and indistinct. Consequently, the Bakhtinian concepts I draw into my cultural analysis, although already well-traveled, journey here in a more accountable or, to use a term employed by both Bakhtin and Bal, more *answerable* manner.<sup>3</sup> This is because the key to a conscientious practice of cultural analysis lies in an awareness that concepts, in each of their makeshift accommodations, are situated and specific. Having alluded now to several of the elements in my title, I wish to elaborate on each of them in a more systematic manner, beginning with Bakhtin.

Although the present version of this book finds Bakhtin in the subtitle (which itself signifies a kind of beyond), here I mark both his temporal primacy and the way such primacy never signals a true origin but rather something that is retroactively constituted in the present. Thus: In the beginning, there *is* the work of Bakhtin. Well, maybe not exactly in the beginning. I originally planned to write a book on performative identities that would summon Bakhtin only in certain parts, but I soon found myself unable to escape the provocations of his concepts, the way they kept speaking to my objects and to questions of identity construction. And so this book developed in a new direction, still concerned with identities and performativity, but now conceiving of these through the lens of Bakhtin's concepts, bringing out most clearly their fundamental intersubjectivity and chronotopic situatedness. To me, this shift made perfect sense. Nevertheless, over the course of this project, I was repeatedly asked the same question, which deserves a considered answer: why Bakhtin and why now?

From the 1980s onward, as a larger proportion of Bakhtin's work became widely available in English and other language translations, a veritable

explosion of critical texts ensued, both within the specialist field of Bakhtin studies and in the humanities generally. By now, nearly every aspect of Bakhtin—his life, his work, the authorship question, his religion, his relation to Marxism, his interdisciplinarity, and even his prosthetic leg—has been extensively debated.<sup>4</sup> In addition, his work has been read comparatively in relation to a host of other philosophers, sociologists, and literary theorists. Although there is still a measure of excitement about the prospect of new—and presumably “better”—translations, of a “definitive” edition of Bakhtin’s *Complete Works* in Russian, and of the possibility of unearthing fresh fragments of writing from his jealously guarded archives, a certain Bakhtin-fatigue can be sensed in the air.<sup>5</sup> Looming above those of us who remain stimulated by his work is the question: how can we breathe new life into his thinking?

The recent turn in Bakhtin criticism toward a more sustained historical investigation of Bakhtin’s philosophical sources, which assigns him a less original and more embedded position in relation to his predecessors and contemporaries, is one way to respond to this question productively.<sup>6</sup> Taking Bakhtin’s work beyond itself, as I do here, is another. Such an effort needs, however, to be clearly defined so that it does not result in a radical move away from Bakhtin or in the dilution of his thought. In the humanities, Bakhtin’s popularity has been sustained by the apparent ease with which the central concepts of his work—dialogism, carnival, chronotope—can be applied to the study of literary texts, films, and other cultural phenomena. Clive Thomson has dubbed this practice the “add-Bakhtin-and-stir” approach (1993: 216). What is overlooked in this practice is that skimming a single text for an isolated concept—sometimes one that is not even Bakhtin’s but a creation of his editors, as with the ubiquitous “dialogic imagination”—means to separate it not only from Bakhtin’s other, often related concepts but also from the contradictory elaborations the same concept receives throughout his oeuvre. Instead of indiscriminately transposing Bakhtin’s concepts across disciplines, the motivations for and theoretical effects of such recontextualizations should be specified.

I want to take Bakhtin’s work beyond itself in a manner that takes into account the structure, rhetoric, and interrelations of his writings. Rather than proposing a recipe where he is selectively read for convenient scraps that serve to spice up readings of popular cultural artifacts, I make his concepts central to my project precisely in their move beyond themselves. More

than a simple mix and match, this approach requires a thoughtful, self-reflexive consideration of the disciplines and theoretical frameworks his concepts can enrich and vice versa, while it prevents me from losing sight of the specificity of Bakhtin's concepts and their place in his work. Hence, I use the word *beyond* not as meaning "outside the scope, range, or understanding of," but in the sense of "more than" or "to the further side of," indicating a supplementation or enhancement of Bakhtin's work, not its supersedure. Following the scientist Isabelle Stengers, Bal distinguishes the negative "diffusion" of concepts that travel between disciplines from their positive "endemic propagation":

The propagation of a concept that emerges in one field, in another field that changes its meaning and whose meaning it, in turn, changes, constitutes the primary feature of a concept, both as asset and liability, or risk. (2002: 32)

The beyond of Bakhtin I seek to delineate must be regarded as the site of such propagation.

In his article "On the Borders of Bakhtin: Dialogisation, Decolonisation," Graham Pechey argues that the transdisciplinary application of Bakhtin's concepts accords with their "constitutively migratory" nature: "To propose the 'circulation' of Bakhtinian concepts is not to propose anything that is foreign to their mode of being: movement or *migration* is inherent in them from the beginning; it is their normal condition" (1989: 40). For Pechey, Bakhtin's concepts are always already in translation in his own work.<sup>7</sup> Their removal to new contexts merely adds another layer of translation or migratory meaning. As long as this migration is motivated, its direction and politics explicated, and the implication of the critic acknowledged, it will have productive effects:

the migration of Bakhtin's concepts into "our" context exposes and explains their inadequacies: this wandering and transplantation is also the condition for their self-correction. The urgent task of Bakhtin's radical readers is, then, to push his concepts still further in their journey, putting them to still more demanding tests. (57)

The method Pechey proposes verges on the practice of cultural analysis. Only cultural analysis would further magnify the requirements of self-reflexivity and responsibility and insist that the migration of Bakhtin's concepts does more than just expose their flaws. Rather than emphasizing self-correction, cultural analysis would insist that such correction occurs

only through a confrontation with otherness, with new objects and different theoretical frameworks. More than a question of dogmatic improvement—which implies that one day Bakhtin’s concepts will be fully “correct”—the commitment of cultural analysis is to keep concepts under discussion, so that they are always pushed to adapt to new circumstances, not for their own sake but to produce theoretically productive encounters with cultural objects.

My testing of Bakhtin’s concepts amounts to bringing them together with popular culture and conceiving of the two as dialogic interlocutors. This I do in order to develop an account of intersubjective identity constructions and assertions that goes beyond a strictly Bakhtinian reading while all the time holding itself accountable for this move, reflecting upon its implications at every step of the way. I share with Peter Hitchcock “a certain radical skepticism about the critical potential of Bakhtin’s principles *on their own terms*,” which motivates my move beyond Bakhtin’s own explications (1997: 81). But Bakhtin’s work is not left behind: I explore the original Bakhtinian context(s) of his concepts in tandem with their new context in the present-ed beyond of cultural analysis. The concepts’ oscillation between their past and present constitutes the shifting space of theoretical productivity. In Hitchcock’s words,

the point is to explore what is sometimes only a gesture in Bakhtin’s work as a means to address the impact of his contribution to levels of practical understanding that may not have formed the first circle of his inquiry. This does not “complete” Bakhtin in any monologic way . . . but it questions the consequences of Bakhtin’s gestures when elaborated within specific contingencies. (81)

The idea is to take Bakhtin’s concepts as deictic signs that point beyond themselves in new directions. In their interplay with the specific contingencies of intersubjective identity construction in my chosen popular cultural artifacts, Bakhtin’s concepts are transformed just as they transform theory.

I am interested, then, not in a static, fixed Bakhtin, but in the “Bakhtin” in quotation marks that Hitchcock employs in his editor’s introduction to the special issue on Bakhtin of the *South Atlantic Quarterly*. With this device, Hitchcock designates “an author who is so exceeded by what defines his possibility . . . that to ‘authorize’ him would be to negate the very author who spurred such interest” (1998a: 516). This book, consequently, is

not designed to provide yet another introduction or an exhaustive overview of Bakhtin's thought; it is not an exploration of his "influence" on popular culture, and it does not seek to "apply" Bakhtin's concepts to cultural artifacts. Rather, I propose to enquire into the specific intersections between Bakhtin's work, a selection of popular cultural objects, and the other theoretical frameworks that these objects call upon. These intersections converge on the quandary of intersubjective identity constructions and assertions.

From Bakhtin's work I take the concepts pertaining to the intersubjective constitution of the self as a social subject. I explore, respectively, the chronotope, excess of seeing, the superaddressee, speech genres, and carnival. The point is not to reify these concepts by establishing what Bakhtin "really meant" by them or by locating their precise philosophical sources. It is rather to expose their relevance in unexpected, present-day theoretical and cultural contexts. By bouncing them off contemporary cultural objects and theoretical perspectives, I bring these concepts into the present and delineate for them a possible, new future beyond Bakhtin. Also marking the "beyond" of my title are the additional concepts of performativity, translation, territory, and versioning, which Bakhtin does not address explicitly. My consideration of these supplementary concepts is prompted by the dialogic confrontation between Bakhtin's work and my chosen popular cultural artifacts. These artifacts, in their resistance to certain aspects of Bakhtin's thinking, invite other theoretical perspectives and new, supplementary conceptualizations. In the course of this volume, therefore, Bakhtin's work travels beyond its own borders to encounter, among others, the performative gender theory of Judith Butler, Pierre Bourdieu's sociology of distinction, Kaja Silverman's psychoanalytic exploration of gaze and voice, and Jean Laplanche's post-Freudian theory of seduction.

The objects that facilitate these encounters differ in theme, medium, scope, nationality, and even popularity. Yet each of them manifests a striking, almost overly obvious relation to the concepts I seek to explore. *Sex and the City's* highly specific setting in the space-time of 1990s Manhattan, together with its relentless thematization of seeing and being seen, invites analysis in terms of the chronotope, performativity, and excessive vision. The impeded speech of the main protagonists in the films *Nell* and *Flawless* and their respective journeys (back) to social intelligibility appear to



exemplify the workings of dialogism and the superaddressee. *Queer as Folk*'s intralingual remake from a British to an American television show, as well as its brazen introduction of a queer voice (queer is understood here as both an activist self-designation and the critical anti-identitarian concept it has become in queer studies) into the straight television landscape of both nations, ask to be examined in terms of speech genres and translation. Finally, the Notting Hill Carnival, as an internally and externally contested event that stages an annual battle over the streets of London, solicits a reading through the concepts of carnival, territory, and versioning.

My readings unpack these seemingly straightforward relations of applicability in order to reveal, in each case, their much more complex nature. Instead of the simple, seamless imposition of the theoretical concept onto the cultural object that these artifacts at first appear to invite, what occurs is a confrontational interaction. Far from surrendering to the concept and illustrating its theoretical validity, the object puts up a measure of resistance, exposing the concept's weaknesses and forcing its reconstruction. This process accords with Bal's description of the aim of cultural analysis, which is

to never just theorize but always to allow the object "to speak back." Making sweeping statements about objects, or citing them as examples, renders them dumb. . . . Even though, obviously, objects cannot speak, they can be treated with enough respect for their irreducible complexity and unyielding muteness—but not mystery—to allow them to check the thrust of an interpretation, and to divert and complicate it. . . . Thus, the objects we analyse enrich both interpretation and theory. This is how theory can change from a rigid master discourse into a live cultural object in its own right. (2002: 45)

Accordingly, rather than having the objects allegorize Bakhtin's concepts—which would risk deforming the objects—I perceive my cultural objects as performing an imagination of a theoretical moment that reflects upon the theory and contributes to its development. The object does not disappear under the theory, but lights up those elements of the theory that do not present a perfect fit. This is how the practice of cultural analysis turns cultural objects into theoretical ones and provokes a move into Bakhtin's beyond, a place where his thought can be renewed.

Fittingly, such renewal is central to Bakhtin's theory of language itself. In "Discourse in the Novel," he distinguishes the process of linguistic

and literary reaccentuation as “unavoidable, legitimate and even productive,” as long as it does not lead to radical distortions or “any vulgarization that oversimplifies re-accentuation . . . and that turns a two-voiced image into one that is flat, single-voiced” (1996c: 420). The reaccentuation effected by cultural analysis consists precisely of taking concepts into their beyond without leaving their previous contexts behind and especially without ignoring complexities and contradictions. In accordance with Bakhtin’s description of literary evolution, it implies growth and renewal rather than replacement:

Every age re-accentuates in its own way the works of its most immediate past. The historical life of classic works is in fact the uninterrupted process of their social and ideological re-accentuation. . . . such works have proved capable of uncovering in each era and against ever new dialogizing backgrounds ever newer aspects of meaning; their semantic content literally continues to grow, to further create out of itself. (421)

Cultural analysis facilitates this process by overtly and self-reflexively positioning the present and the analyst herself as dialogizing backgrounds.

### Intersubjectivities

The second focus of this book is that of intersubjectivities. Intersubjectivities are my way of moving beyond identities without leaving the latter term or its political implications behind completely. I chart this move here, starting with a discussion of identities. I use the plural on purpose to indicate a multiplication and differentiation of the ways a subject articulates its social belonging. This multiplication and differentiation precludes the selfsameness of the subject both on the synchronic and the diachronic axis, both internally and externally. As Butler has argued, to move beyond the principle of identity as sameness, the term *identities* needs to signify more than a simple aggregation of identities, each of which remains discrete in and of itself:

Pluralization disrupts the social ontology of the subject itself when that relationality is understood not merely as what persists *among* subjects, but as the internal impossibility of the subject as a discrete and unitary kind of being. Identity as effect, as site, as dynamic, as simultaneously formed and formative, is not equivalent to the notion of identity as *subject* and *ground*. Reading identities as they are

situated and formed in relation to one another means moving beyond the heuristic requirement of identity itself. (1995: 446)

The task Butler sets is one of thinking identity beyond itself in a manner that includes both difference—the difference of the subject in relation to itself and to others—and a specificity or situatedness that does not hark back to a primordial originality, authenticity, or wholeness. This entails a conceptualization of the subject that highlights “its capacity to move *beyond* itself, a movement that does not return to where it always was, identity as movement in the promising sense” (447, emphasis added). Once more we are encouraged to move into the beyond, this time our own.

Bakhtin’s concepts and the additional ones I elaborate as their supplements provide for such a redirection in thinking identities, away from their associations with fixed and coherent essences of being. They help move toward a vision that presents identities as multiple and variable yet at the same time situated and specific constructions, grounded in the spatiotemporal and discursive contexts of their intersubjective articulations. Paul Gilroy’s comments on “identity’s foundational slipperiness” and the “dizzying variety of ideas condensed into the concept of identity” point to the need for definition, especially in a scholarly context, but they also caution against reifying one particular meaning of identity over all the others (2000a: 106, 98). Identity needs to be contextualized and specified in its multiple theoretical uses, conceding the implications of these uses for our thinking of identity, its construction, and its (re)assertions.

Focusing my exploration of identities on Bakhtin poses an immediate problem, given that Bakhtin appears to have little to say on the subject of identity or on the identity of a subject. He tends to speak not of subjects, but of persons, selves, others, individuals, collectives, speakers, listeners, authors, characters, or heroes. Moreover, he refers to their self-consciousnesses as subjectivities, a term that for him is not equivalent to identities. Existing as a human being with a consciousness of oneself as a feeling and thinking entity and a capacity to act is not necessarily to have a fixed identity that guarantees coherence and unity over time and across space. Subjectivity can, of course, be constructed in this manner, but this is only one possibility among many others. It is, moreover, not one Bakhtin considers desirable.

Bakhtin’s association of subjectivity-as-fixed-identity with a negatively evaluated sameness comes to the fore in “Forms of Time and of the

Chronotope in the Novel.” There, he discusses the Greek romance as a genre where the image of the human being is characterized by a “distinctive *correspondence of an identity with a particular self*” (1996b: 105). The hero of the Greek romance, after going through a series of adventures, emerges “with his *identity* absolutely unchanged” (105). These remarks indicate that for Bakhtin the self does not necessarily correspond to an identity: The self is particular in the sense that it is distinct from others, but from this it does not follow that it possesses a singular, constant, and fixed identity. Identity and selfhood (or subjectivity) are distinct and independent concepts.

The correspondence of subjectivity to identity, durability, continuity, sameness, completeness, immobility, and unity is not absolute, as Bakhtin’s discussion of the *adventure novel of everyday life* in the same essay demonstrates. In the adventure novel of everyday life, of which Apuleius’s *The Golden Ass* is the paradigmatic example, the image of the hero is characterized by a strange combination of identity and metamorphosis. This combination sees the hero develop in a temporal sequence that proceeds “spasmodically” like a “line with ‘knots’ in it,” where the knots mark points of transformation (113). The hero does not stay the same; his subjectivity is distinguished precisely by his ability to be transformed into someone or something else (and back again).

Hence, Bakhtin views subjectivity as a differentiated construction that may correspond fully to identity, that may even incorporate both identity and transformation, but that may also occur in a myriad of other forms, none of which is universal. Identity, as a possible and sometimes necessary way of configuring subjectivity, is only one way of making sense of a condition that in itself exists only as an abstraction. Thus, where Bakhtin defines a social language as “a concrete socio-linguistic belief system that defines a distinct identity for itself within the boundaries of a language that is unitary only in the abstract” (1996c: 356), I propose, analogous to this, a view of the social subject as constructing a distinctive (but not necessarily stable) identity for itself within the boundaries provided by the structures of time-space, vision and speech, which appear to the subject as unitary, natural, and necessary, but which are in fact intersubjectively established and maintained traditions or practices.

Valentin Voloshinov, a fellow-member of what is now commonly known as the Bakhtin Circle, presents a view of identity similar to Bakhtin’s

when, in *Marxism and the Philosophy of Language*, he refers to the “normative identity” of the word as that which guarantees that the word will be understood within a particular language community (1986: 53). Although a measure of identity is a requirement for understanding, when this identity becomes complete and normative it has a negative, ossifying effect: a word’s normative identity excludes creativity by presenting language as “an inviolable, incontestable norm which the individual, for his part, can only accept” (53). As in Bakhtin’s discussion of the Greek romance, identity here stands for immutability, for the construction of the word’s meaning as a given essence that must simply be accepted.

The normative identity of language assigns to the reader a passive position, whereas Voloshinov’s alternative construction of meaning as contextual ordains an active engagement:

the task of understanding does not basically amount to recognizing the form used, but rather to understanding it in a particular, concrete context, to understanding its meaning in a particular utterance, i.e., it amounts to understanding its novelty and not to recognizing its identity. (68)

Similarly, understanding one’s own subjectivity or that of someone else cannot amount simply to recognizing a preexisting, unchangeable core identity, but has to take the form of an understanding of the forms of identity created in the particular contexts of the subject’s intersubjective constitution through words, visions, and actions. Bakhtin and Voloshinov both consider identity-as-selfsameness a possible but undesirable conceptualization of subjectivity and meaning. What each thinker proposes instead, in his own way, is an active, multiple and variable construction of subjectivity as becoming, as continually renewing itself. This is a contextualized subjectivity that arises in and through the subject’s everyday practices in the ongoing *eventness* of life, Bakhtin’s “Being-as-event” (1993: 57). As Michael Gardiner writes, Bakhtin and Voloshinov aim

to conceptualize human beings as neither entirely autonomous, self-directed entities nor as surface effects of a deep epistemic structure, but rather as reflexive agents embodying a range of socially determined practical capacities, a repertoire of collective skills and resources. (1992: 166)

Dialogism is the concept Bakhtin most consistently opposes to identity and through which he rejects “monadism, the illusion of closed-off bodies or isolated psyches in bourgeois individualism and the

concept of a pristine, closed-off, static identity and truth wherever it may be found" (Holquist 1990: 90). Dialogism proposes a relation not of equality or even contingency, but of a simultaneity able to accommodate difference and distance as well as similarity. As I specify it in Chapter 4, dialogism appears as a particular ethics of intersubjectivity that relies on the preservation of alterity in identity. In this guise, dialogism also appears in Ien Ang's article, "Identity Blues," where Ang describes her attempts, as an Asian migrant in Australia, to forge conciliatory relations with other communities through a practice of everyday "social sharing," one that results in

the incremental and *dialogic construction of lived identities* which slowly dissolve the boundaries between the past and the future, between "where we come from" and "what we might become," between being and becoming: being is enhanced by becoming, and becoming is never possible without a solid ground in being. (2000: 11, emphasis added)

Dialogically lived identities here emerge as paradoxical constructions that surmount binary thinking: they are both constructed and lived, both being and becoming, both historical and of the future, both self and other.

Identities, however, are not chosen or shared at will and dialogism is not always achieved. It is necessary to ask how subjects emerge as reflexive agents with a repertoire of social skills and resources, as well as to inquire which social processes facilitate and adjudicate this emergence. Although identities are often felt to precede and determine the subject's acts, Butler's theory of performativity suggests that the practical capacities believed to be expressions of our identities are actually constitutive of them.<sup>8</sup> Our self-expression is preceded and circumscribed by power relations and performative structures of social interpellation, so that for Butler the gendered subject is "produced or brought into being as it is 'announced' in and through the stylized rituals and repetitions of everyday life" where these practices "retroactively, and over time, create a (gender) identity effect" (Campbell and Harbord 1999: 229). What makes us who we are is not a preexisting, invariable core of identity, but a series of reiterative identity effects that allow us to act in the world. The performative dimension of identity—in particular the constraint it places on personal agency—is one of the extensions that indicate my move into Bakhtin's beyond.<sup>9</sup>

I want to retain the concept of identity not as referring to a unified, autonomous, and unchanging entity, but as it has been rethought in terms of performativity and social practice. Ang, Gilroy, and other postcolonial theorists have reformulated identity as a lived category that harbors a crucial political dimension without thereby ignoring the way identities—even oppositional ones—often manifest themselves as constrictive enforcements of sameness that exclude both internal and external difference. In arguing for a “conjunctural understanding” of identities capable of taking into account the shifting political relations and specific historical and material circumstances that contextualize all identity constructions, postcolonial theory creates a new perspective on identity that acknowledges the way “identity can be a basis for connection as well as disconnection” (Clifford 2000: 106).

Ang argues against relinquishing identity on the grounds that “at the level of experience and common sense identities are generally expressed (and mobilized politically) precisely because they *feel* natural and essential” (2000: 2). In the same vein, Gilroy writes that, despite identity’s fluidity in theory, in everyday life it is “lived as a coherent (if not always stable) experiential sense of self” (1993: 102). Taking identities seriously as lived realities that can form a basis for political action is not irreconcilable with the view that such identities are performatively constructed. As long as we realize that the subject does not precede the performative practices through which identity is established but arises in and through them, and as long as we construe this subject’s agency not as directly expressive or autonomous but as simultaneously constructed and (re)constructing, the function of identity categories as rallying points for collective political action can be preserved.

Gilroy appropriately speaks of “imaginative identity-work, always materially constrained and culturally specified” (2000b: 127). Designating identity as work or labor accords with Bakhtin’s description, in “Author and Hero in Aesthetic Activity,” of coherent subjectivity as a task always yet to be completed: “My own unity, for myself, is one that confronts me eternally as a unity-yet-to-be . . . not the unity of my already-being, but the unity of my not-yet-being” (1990a: 126). Identity-as-unity is posited rather than achieved and has to be worked on, both by myself and by those around me, throughout my entire life. Such work, Gilroy insists, is imaginative: it takes the form of a creative production of a life story, the end and ultimate shape of which cannot be known. Rather than being

merely descriptive or cognitive, identity is an active, creative assignment carried out within a social realm whose relations of domination impose material constraints upon it. These constraints circumscribe, but can never fully fix, the outcome of the subject's identity-work because of the specificity of the subject, not only in a cultural sense but also in terms of the subject's nationality, ethnicity, gender, race, class, and, on an even more basic level, in terms of this subject's spatiotemporal situatedness and actual intersubjective interactions with living others. Identity, Gilroy writes, "marks out the divisions and subsets in our social lives and helps to define the boundaries between our uneven, local attempts to make sense of the world" (2000a: 98). Our attempts to make sense of ourselves and of the world around us are uneven and multiple, yet at the same time local and specific: each attempt is identified with a context that either situates or grounds it without implying definitive determination.

Identity formation, then, is about creatively constructing a sense of belonging on various levels, about narrating ourselves in relation to our multiple intersecting and often contradictory affiliations. It is a question of acknowledging "the various frequencies of address that play upon us and constitute our always incomplete identities in an unstable field" (Gilroy 2000a: 276). The following analyses of my chosen cultural objects specify the frequencies of address that turn identity into "a noun of process" (252) as performatively determined and governed by established chronotopes, yet at the same time subject to destabilizing processes of translation, territorialization, and versioning. Although such frequencies of address precede us, they do not remain entirely abstract: they are relayed to us on the plane of concrete intersubjective interaction where they both reiterate us and are reiterated by us.

Constructing belonging is never an individual act, as the etymology of the word *belonging*—derived as it is from the Old English *gelang* "at hand, together with"—clearly indicates. Belonging is fundamentally intersubjective, involving actual other subjects and more abstract conceptions of alterity (such as the big Other of Lacanian psychoanalysis). Where Ang's definition of identity as "the way we represent and narrativize ourselves to ourselves and others" (2000: 1) configures identity as self-narrativization *for* the other, Bakhtin would argue that such narrativization can occur only *through* the other. I can begin to narrate myself only after others have told me about myself and, because I cannot step outside my



own life, I can never produce a finished narrative. We are not our own autonomous authors, but editors working with the stories told about us, versioning these stories into provisional images of our past, present, and future. According to Stuart Hall:

Far from only coming from the still small point of truth inside us, identities actually come from outside, they are the way in which we are recognized and then come to step into the place of the recognitions which others give us. Without the others there is no self, there is no self-recognition. (1995: 5)

Ang, however, is right to point out that although we cannot compose a finished account of our past, present, and future, we nevertheless present ourselves to ourselves and to others as if we could. This as if is a crucial precondition for political agency. Consequently, identity remains useful in expressing the provisional, purposeful narrativization of (inter)subjectivity that helps subjects to claim a position—to contest a territory—in the social realm and its network of power relations. In order to fulfill this function in an effective manner, however, identities must first be reconfigured as intersubjectivities, in terms of their constraints and flexibilities. What I propose here is a move beyond identities toward identities-as-intersubjectivities.

I have already defined identities as multiple, ongoing efforts of creative construction. Considering their fundamental intersubjectivity, as emphasized by Bakhtin's transformation of "personal identity into an intersubjective dynamic" (Brandist 2002: 179), identities become coproductions, processes taking place not within the self, but in between self and other. Identities oscillate between exterior and interior, as the self takes on the determinations offered up by others and fashions them into provisional self-narratives. As noted above, dialogism is the privileged figure of Bakhtinian intersubjectivity. In Hitchcock's words,

it suggests a potential for intersubjectivity in which the "I" becomes "I" not by canceling or relegating its Other. Instead, it continually redefines itself and others in a dissonance that has its material expression in the struggle over signs. (1993a: 49)

Dialogic intersubjectivity marks dissonance and distance rather than harmony and closeness; it is not about recognizing the other as the same, but about respecting the other as different and taking responsibility for this difference. The other does not become an object, but is recognized as another subject. Dialogism means responding to alterity without negation or

assimilation. It is, however, only one type of intersubjectivity. Consequently, I reserve the term *dialogism* for the specific form of interpersonality or interculturality that Bakhtin privileges as the most productive relationship between self and other. Not all identities are dialogic, but, I contend, they are all intersubjective. To understand how identities differ in their attitudes toward a specific other, or alterity in general, it is imperative to recognize the different forms identities-as-intersubjectivities take, particularly if we wish to avoid referring identity back to the Cartesian subject and his deliberate, transparent relations with other such subjects.

In an article entitled “The Impossibly Intersubjective and the Logic of the Both,” Hitchcock points to the difficulty of conceiving intersubjectivity when it is no longer predicated on an autonomous subject: “We ask that it should encompass the dealings of I and Other, however vexed, while yet removing all and everything that it connects as the tired conspiracy of centered subjectivity” (2007: 26). This paradox can only be overcome by a radical rethinking of the intersubjective, one that no longer refers it (exclusively) to personal interaction, but to the interplay of different conceptualizations of the subject: “intersubjectivity is not between subjects; it is across principles of subjectivity itself” (27). The expression identities-as-intersubjectivities denotes, then, the way identities appear as negotiations between principles of subjectivity. Such principles are, however, themselves constituted and maintained intersubjectively, enacted (performatively) between subjects, even if never mastered by them. Intersubjectivity as that which occurs between subjects does not, therefore, disappear off the map, but is now predicated on the ways these subjects, in their interactions, reiterate their subjection to particular doctrines of subjectivity.

My use of the conjunction “as” in identities-as-intersubjectivities indicates how identity cannot be thought of separately from intersubjectivity, while the attempt to render intersubjectivity in the plural marks the multiplicity of their interconnections, the way the subject’s intersubjectivity involves interactions with various intersecting alterities, both individual and collective. On the one hand, constructing an individual identity without reference to the collective (national, cultural, gender, and class) identities that circumscribe the subject’s interactions with individual others, is simply impossible. Yet, on the other hand, such collective identities never totally determine the subject and whom it meets, so that a national identity

may be intersected not only by other collective identities but also by the highly specific, individual affiliations that derive from direct personal contact. In one subject, therefore, various principles of subjectivity and a whole range of concrete intersubjective interactions have to be negotiated, all producing their specific material effects.

The intersubjective, in its very impossibility, grounds identities in *interaction*, where *action* signals a locus of agency: the intersubjective acts upon us, but we also (inter)act it. While this interaction does not make us free to do whatever we want, it emphasizes our activity in “doing” our own identities. Such activity implies, on the one hand, our complicity in and responsibility for the often constrictive and necessarily exclusionary structures that compel us as subjects (I develop these as the chronotope, performativity, the cultural gaze, and the cultural addressee). On the other hand, because of its foundation in practical interaction, this activity is always open to a redoing, which, in Chapter 8, I call versioning. It occurs through the creative manipulation of discursive genres, translations, and territories.

The notion of identities-as-intersubjectivities is not exclusive to Bakhtin. Recently, intersubjective relations as negotiations between identity and alterity have become of prime interest in cultural studies, post-colonial theory, feminist theory, and queer criticism. Butler’s work, for one, moves in an intersubjective direction when, in *Undoing Gender*, she signals the need to

underscore the value of being beside oneself, of being a porous boundary, given over to others, finding oneself in a trajectory of desire in which one is taken out of oneself, and resituated irreversibly in a field of others in which one is not the presumptive center. (2004: 25)

Although this statement avows the subject’s dependency on others for its subjectivation, these others, for Butler, remain predominantly imaginary, capitalized Others, referring the constitution of the subject to a psychic realm of alterity, which remains largely impervious to the sphere of concrete intersubjective interaction. In psychoanalytic theory, writers as diverse as Kaja Silverman, Jean Laplanche, and Jessica Benjamin have decentered the intrapsychical “I” by arguing that the formation of subjectivity requires the active input of the other as an embodied, empirically present, outside subject. In the following chapters, I conceive of intersubjectivities both in terms

of the interaction between concrete subjects (individual and collective) and in terms of the interplay between constructions of subjectivity, maintaining that the two cannot be theorized separately. The tension between different forms of subjectivity circumscribes the kinds of subjects and the forms of interaction that can exist, but this tension is enacted on the level of intersubjective interaction as a reiterative process, which allows for difference in each new enactment. To demonstrate how these intersubjectivities impact each other in the construction and assertion of normative and oppositional identities, I now turn to popular culture.

### Popular Culture

I chose to focus on popular culture because I believe that in this realm the paradox of recognizing identities-as-intersubjectivities as social and performative constructions, while at the same time still taking them seriously as lived and politically active realities, is played out with particular poignancy. In addition, popular culture accords with my penchant for the beyond as a site of destabilization. As Johannes Fabian argues:

When we add the qualifier “popular” to culture, we do so because we believe it allows us to conceptualize certain kinds of human praxis that the concept of culture without the qualifier either ignores or makes disappear. Although the two concepts do not differ in that they constitute practices, culture *tout court* is usually talked about as if it existed as an entity, as if it was there to be studied; discourse on popular culture tends to be about movements or processes rather than entities. (1998: 1)

Popular culture is not only *about* movements or processes, but is a concept that is always on the move, always pointing beyond itself. This marks it as an inherently relational category that, according to John Storey’s influential *Introductory Guide to Cultural Theory and Popular Culture*, is “always defined, implicitly or explicitly, in contrast to other conceptual categories” (1993: 1). The way that intersubjectivity inhabits the very concept of popular culture leads me to see it not as an “empty conceptual category” like Storey (1), but rather as an overpopulated one, where this overpopulation enforces a constant self-reflection that aligns it with the practice of cultural analysis.

So, how does this book reflect on popular culture and its various, often conflicting definitions? Whereas most attempts to define popular

culture are based on excluding certain of its possible meanings, I aim to bring together some of the elements that are usually kept apart and present popular culture as a site of negotiation. Storey, for example, distinguishes between *lived* cultures and cultural *texts* (2). Although both of these may be popular, they are usually theorized separately. My objects, which include television programs, films, and literature, but also the Notting Hill Carnival, cross this divide. Such crossing occurs most insistently in Chapters 7 and 8, where I present a combined analysis of the Notting Hill Carnival and its textual and visual representation in Linton Kwesi Johnson's dub poem, "Forces of Victory" (1979), and Isaac Julien's experimental film, *Territories* (1984). The latter, I argue, actively incorporate the eventness of the lived carnival into their poetic and filmic structures.

Storey lists six prominent definitions of popular culture, each of which comes into play here, but each of which is also questioned in some way by its juxtaposition with the others. Storey's first definition addresses the quantitative dimension of popular culture, where it appears as "culture which is widely favoured or well liked by many people" (1993: 7). This distinguishes popular culture from culture in general—or "high" culture—not as a purely residual category (as in Storey's second definition, where popular culture is simply *not* high culture), but in terms of its general *popularity*, measured by the size of its audience and the scope of its distribution.<sup>10</sup> Popular culture comprises those cultural artifacts that are seen and talked about by large audiences, whose members do not always fit neatly into a social class or any other category of social differentiation. One of the most important aspects of this definition of popular culture is that it reaches across the entire social spectrum, even if not everyone interprets its products in the same manner.

This notion of popular culture is intimately related to what is commonly called mass culture (Storey's third definition). Mass culture has been disparaged in much cultural criticism because of the way it is thought to turn its audiences into passive consumers of dominant cultural propaganda.<sup>11</sup> Both this position and its opposite, where mass culture is celebrated as inherently resistive, have now been largely invalidated.<sup>12</sup> Between these polarities a more productive approach can, however, be articulated, precisely by bringing out the element of popularity. This element shifts attention from the supply side of the culture industry to the demand side, where the consumer appears as an active force. Colin MacCabe (1986)

argues that because popular culture is produced with a view to creating an audience, this audience finds agency in the culture industry's need for the approval of its products. Audiences do not sit back indifferently as the industry puts its products before them; they exercise an important, active power of distinction by ignoring certain offerings and accepting others in a process that, notwithstanding the advances in market research, remains largely unpredictable. Witness the large numbers of television shows canceled by networks each year, sometimes after only a few episodes. No one could have predicted the extent of *Sex and the City's* popularity across the Western world or the creative ways of reading the series that emerged in the different viewing contexts and on the Internet. The same goes for *Queer as Folk*. Although many artifacts are produced as popular culture, they can only truly ascend to that moniker when they are well liked by their audiences. In this manner, the audience exerts agency within the field of popular culture, even if it does not necessarily do so in a progressive way, often preferring precisely those representations favored by the dominant order.

The production side of popular culture, too, exhibits multiple forms of agency. A distinction can be drawn between, on the one hand, institutions primarily interested in the product's commercial success (television networks, publishing companies, producers, film studios) and, on the other, institutions and agents (cultural funds, editors, writers, directors, actors) who exhibit additional interests, possibly including a desire to challenge dominant cultural representations. Simon Frith refers to the "tripartite structure of communication" (1998: 575) present in contemporary cultural forms, which distinguishes creator, producer, and consumer and allows for conflicts between them, so that a single object of popular culture may harbor contradictory meanings both on the side of production and on the side of consumption.

Storey's fourth definition of popular culture sees it as "culture which originates from 'the people'" (1993: 12). Its association with authenticity brings this definition close to folk culture, which is the form of popular culture we find in Bakhtin's work. Often, it acquires a specific class dimension, as in Stuart Hall's description of popular culture as "the culture of working people, the labouring classes and the poor" (1998: 442). The latter is, however, too narrowly focused on the production side of popular culture and on class-based social distinctions. Although class continues to

function as an important nexus of social struggle, it needs to be correlated with other modes of differentiation such as gender, sexuality, race, and ethnicity. Popular culture exceeds working-class culture on the sides of both production and consumption and it is also not practicable to define popular culture as the culture of the oppressed, as the place where their resistance to the dominant culture is inevitably mobilized, even if it can sometimes function in this way, as my discussions of *Queer as Folk* and the Notting Hill Carnival bear out.

An alternative definition capable of including other than class-based distinctions and of conceptualizing the forces of incorporation on the side of the dominant culture, is the one based on Gramsci's notion of hegemony. According to this definition, popular culture functions as a "terrain of exchange . . . marked by resistance and incorporation" (Storey 1993: 13). As such, it accommodates class conflict, but also the struggles surrounding race, gender, and sexual preference that my objects address. In the end, popular culture, as I regard it, is the site where the struggle between dominant culture and the cultures of marginalized social groups is most openly and indeed most democratically played out. Theorizing this site also inevitably involves thinking about where popularity, the culture industry, and "the people" fit in, so that the other definitions of popular culture are included in the struggle over the concept itself. Popular culture as a site of hegemonic struggle also prompts a rethinking of the high-low distinction in relation to the dominant-marginalized opposition, exposing the way dominant cultures include both high and low cultural forms, as do marginalized ones.

This brings into play Storey's sixth and final definition of popular culture, based on the postmodernist rejection of the distinction between high and low culture. While I would not go so far as to argue that the latter distinction has completely disappeared—its continuing function as an instrument of social distinction is clear, for example, from Bourdieu's work—I agree that the boundary marking it has become increasingly porous. The problematic categorization of Johnson's dub poetry—which is not popular in quantitative terms, but does incorporate a popular musical form (reggae) and originate from a marginalized, oppositional social position—as well as Julien's meaningful use of a popular event in his avant-garde film testify to this.<sup>13</sup> My inclusion of the latter two objects in a book whose title privileges popular culture is also legitimized by the way

cultural analysis studies *all* forms of culture, not separately but as speaking to (and sometimes through) each other. Such a conversation occurs in both Johnson's poetry and Julien's film. "Forces of Victory" combines poetry with reggae, and the fact that neither is privileged over the other is clear from the way the work appeared in a volume of poetry as well as on compact disc (CD). This constitutes what I later call a *versioning*, one that works to implicate the realms of high and popular culture—and their respective audiences—in each other.

In the case of Julien's film, we at first appear to be dealing with a straightforward example of "high" culture rewriting popular culture. As a twenty-five-minute experimental film, *Territories* is clearly not popular in the sense of a broadly viewed, well-liked mass cultural object. The film—produced by Sankofa, a film and video collective dedicated to developing an independent black film culture—does, however, partake of popular culture as a site of struggle between dominant and marginalized groups in its politically motivated presentation of a black point of view. Consequently, it presents not so much a comment on popular culture and its transformation into high culture as it does a process of contagion by which elements of the Notting Hill Carnival as a *lived* cultural event are integrated in a high-art film structure. This establishes a concrete, material link between, on the one hand, strategies of resistance on the streets and, on the other, avant-garde film practices (rapid montage, superimposition) and critical theory (the film cites works by Edward Brathwaite, Michelle Cliff, Paul Gilroy, and Kobena Mercer). Thus, the film actively partakes in the reflection on popular culture by presenting popular and high culture not as mutually exclusive, but as forms that can work together to develop an oppositional strategy within the hegemonic struggle surrounding the meaning of race in British society.

Although I touch on the production and consumption sides of popular culture, the methodology of cultural analysis prompts me to situate the hegemonic struggles engaged in by popular culture mainly at the textual level. Consequently, my approach centers on close readings of my chosen popular cultural objects. I am interested not only in the way identity constructions and assertions are achieved *through* popular culture but also how they appear *in* popular culture, because I believe the latter represents an oft-neglected step toward understanding how subjects construct their identities in relation to popular cultural representations. The content of popular



culture is not without its influence on the processes of identification and disidentification that accompany it; we do not identify with objects in general, regardless of their narrative or visual content, but rather with the specific forms of self-narrativization these objects present to us and with their particular position in the struggle between dominant and marginal cultural forms.

Many artifacts of popular culture present identities as ready-made molds into which subjects can pour themselves through a simple, transparent move of identification. Such artifacts create what James Clifford aptly calls “a superficial shopping mall of identities” (2000: 101). However, the sheer number of (contradictory) identities offered up by all these artifacts together ultimately works to highlight identity’s complexity and constructed quality. Popular culture presents the reader/viewer with a plethora of identity positions that appear as competing self-narrativizations, all undermining each other’s claims to truth or naturalness. In addition, many popular cultural artifacts thematize the problem of identity construction at the internal level. This is the case, for instance, in the television series *Sex and the City*, which revolves around its central protagonist’s convoluted attempts to narrate her own and her friends’ sexual identities in a weekly newspaper column. This and other popular cultural representations of the struggle to “find” one’s identity, particularly when the latter is not presented as essential or unitary and when its discovery is continually deferred, present their audiences with a point of identification that centers precisely around the complexity of intersubjective identity constructions, around their failure to secure the self.

Approaching popular cultural artifacts through a practice of textual and visual analysis is not without its problems. Michael Schudson warns of the danger that such analysis “may inadvertently romanticize the semiotic process itself” by reading meanings into objects that are not discerned by their audiences (1998: 499). A similar concern sounds in Pierre Bourdieu’s remark, made in a conversation with Terry Eagleton:

It is a form of dominant chic among intellectuals to say “Look at these cartoons,” or some other cultural item, “do they not display great cultural creativity?” Such a person is saying “You don’t see that, but I do, and I am the first to see it.” The perception may be valid; but there is an overstatement of the capacity of these new things to change the structure of the distribution of symbolic capital. To exaggerate the extent of change is, in a sense, a form of populism. (Eagleton and Bourdieu 1994: 274)

To this I would reply that, as a cultural analyst who takes her objects seriously, I consider myself part of their audience, not separated from or standing above or before other readers/viewers. Moreover, in a world where media products cross national and cultural borders as a matter of course, audiences and interpretations are inevitably multiple. As long as cultural analysts do not present their interpretations as definitive or universally shared, there is no reason to suspect them of elitism. We should, however, heed the second part of Bourdieu's comment and be careful not to establish a direct causal relation between textual sites of opposition and social change. If a popular cultural text or event can indeed work to mobilize an effective social opposition—as happens, for example, in the case of the Notting Hill Carnival—it does not do so in every case.

Popular culture, then, is neither completely encapsulated by the dominant culture, nor is it by definition oppositional; instead, it appears as “a sort of constant battlefield” where dominant and oppositional forces vie with each other for territory (Hall 1998: 447). On this battlefield, nothing is stable: processes of co-optation, expropriation, and reappropriation are constantly at work, so that even the distinction between dominant and oppositional forms is blurred. “The meaning of a cultural form and its place or position in the cultural field,” Hall observes, “is *not* inscribed inside its form. Nor is its position fixed once and for ever” (449). Significantly, at this point, Hall cites Voloshinov, enlisting his view that linguistic signs are capable of resignification through different social groups or at different moments in the history of one social group. Hall relates this resignification to the way the meaning and effect of cultural forms vary within the realm of popular culture. Popular culture is a realm of social struggle where cultural forms and traditions are creatively reformulated both in the service of the dominant culture and in the service of its subversion: “popular culture is one of the sites where this struggle for and against the culture of the powerful is engaged: it is also the stake to be won or lost in that struggle. It is the arena of consent and resistance” (453). Hall's perception of popular culture as at once the site of struggle and—because of the pervasiveness and profitability of its images, texts, and sounds—its prize, points to its inherently political status: popular culture is the realm where the territory of identity is contested in a particularly hot manner, and where this contestation produces concrete, material consequences. John Caughie writes that “popular culture matters” because, as “one of the sites where

forms of consciousness and identity are constituted,” it bears within it a “political urgency” (1986: 162). Through my chapters, I trace the politics of the popular cultural construction and (re)assertion of identities-as-intersubjectivities, on the sides of the dominant and the marginal, in terms of constraint as well as agency.

### From Chronotope to Versioning

My theory of identities-as-intersubjectivities proceeds from a discussion, in Chapters 1–4, of the way intersubjective processes of identity construction are differentiated, situated, and circumscribed by specific chronotopic and performative contexts, which produce particular regimes of vision and speech. In their interaction with Bakhtin’s concepts, the mass cultural objects central to these chapters—*Sex and the City*, *Nell*, and *Flawless*—primarily work to theorize identity construction in terms of the subject’s enforced subjection to dominant cultural modes of interpellation. At the same time, each of the objects already marks certain points of weakness inherent to these modes and their performative reproduction. In Chapters 5–8, I explore how these points of weakness may be exploited to create room for the assertion of marginalized identity positions. I suggest that identity constructions, even marginalized ones, can be repositioned and reshaped in and through their intersubjective rearticulation in the popular cultural arena. My two cultural objects for Chapters 5–8—*Queer as Folk* and the Notting Hill Carnival (as live event and in its textual and visual representations)—partake in popular culture from an overtly oppositional position, aiming to reposition and empower queer and black identities respectively. I configure the rearticulations these objects achieve under the concepts of speech genres, translation, territory, and versioning.

This two-part structure does not indicate a decisive schism between the first and second parts of the book. In the end, it is precisely the interplay between, on the one hand, the differentiated specificity and situatedness of dominant intersubjective identity constructions and, on the other hand, their potential for equally specific and situated recontextualizations that keeps identities in process. Our ongoing struggle to understand and gain recognition for our identities and those of others is played out in the tension between my starting point of presenting identities as grounded in

diverse configurations of time-space and my final conceptualization of identities as subject to creative versioning.

In Chapter 1, my analysis of the popular novel and television series *Sex and the City* situates identities in distinct spatiotemporal contexts or chronotopes that each stage subjectivity and frame its experiential content in their own way. I expand Bakhtin's chronotope from a literary concept into a social one that designates the intersubjectively established and maintained practice of constructing the spatiotemporal worlds in which we live and through which we define ourselves. Since the object resists a purely chronotopic analysis, I also investigate the interplay between the concept of chronotope, Butler's theory of gender performativity, and Bourdieu's sociology of field and habitus. *Sex and the City* shows that these theories are not mutually exclusive, but complementary: the subject's identity is staged and framed in their critical interaction.

I examine the intertwining of chronotope and performativity in greater detail in Chapter 2, focusing on belonging. By analyzing a chapter from the *Sex and the City* novel, the television adaptation of this chapter, and Joel Schumacher's film, *Flawless*, I make a series of theoretical points about the relationship between conflicting chronotopes and the effect this relationship has on the identities of those who travel from one chronotope to the other or get caught in between. Together, the three objects invite us to supplement the chronotope with Bourdieu's notions of habitus and *illusio*, to clarify how the chronotopic situation of an individual performative act influences its effect, to shed light on the distinction between performance and performativity, and, finally, to stage a productive exchange between Bakhtin's theory of the utterance and Jacques Derrida's theory of iterability.

Chapter 3 explores the role of vision in establishing and maintaining intersubjective identities. Its object, a *Sex and the City* episode entitled "The Real Me," suggests that chronotopic belonging lies largely in the eye of the beholder. By way of an intertextual reference to the myth of Narcissus, the episode invokes Bakhtin's notion of the other's "excess of seeing," defined as a separate, exterior agency of embodiment. Against models of intersubjectivity that propose an empathic merging of self and other, this conceptualization of the intersubjective look stresses the importance of outsideness, distance, and difference. Each of the four story lines of "The Real Me" offers a different perspective on excessive vision and its

relation to other theorizations of intersubjective vision, most importantly Jacques Lacan's cultural gaze.

The intersubjective look is supplemented by the intersubjective address in Chapter 4, where I examine the impact on identity construction of how we address our speech. My examination of the audiovisual rendering of voice and its address in *Sex and the City* and the film *Nell* (directed by Michael Apted) suggests that our utterances orient themselves toward a potential understanding that functions as a precondition for the utterance having been spoken in the first place. The use of voice-over and voice-off in the two objects exposes how social power relations inhabit speech, investing our vocal identities with a normative regime of addressivity. I theorize this regime through Jean Laplanche's enigmatic address, Bakhtin's superaddressee, and Voloshinov's potential addressee, marking a distinction in relation to all three by introducing a new term: *the cultural addressee*. As an intersubjectively constituted and maintained coercive norm that determines who speaks, who remains silent, and who is heard, this cultural addressee is the vocal counterpart of the cultural gaze and determines how a particular social group deals with (absolute) alterity.

With Chapter 5, I progress from discussing the constraints intersubjectivity imposes on identity construction to exploring those intersubjective strategies of subversion that exploit the element of instability produced in the reiterative structuring of identity. In other words, the chapter marks a transition from the normative identity constructions at stake in the first part of my book to the oppositional identities that are the focus of its remainder. I suggest that marginalized social groups can employ practices of linguistic and visual resignification to establish, assert, and gain recognition for their identities in the dominant cultural domain—not on its terms, however, but on their own. Practices of resignification, if attuned to the chronotopic and performative specificity of the norms they seek to challenge, can refract the cultural addressee and the cultural gaze, potentially forcing them to expand their definitions of intelligibility and visibility in order to see and hear the other *as* other, thereby allowing different principles of subjectivity into the intersubjective. I explore the force and limit of resignification through an analysis of the positioning of queer identities in the British television series *Queer as Folk* and its American remake. This twofold object conjures up Bakhtin's concept of speech genres

and Hamid Naficy's notion of accented cinema, which modulate each other.

The interplay between the two versions of *Queer as Folk*, I contend in Chapter 6, suggests a particular, dialogic practice of translation as a strategy for effectively asserting marginalized identities in the dominant cultural realm. I present *Queer as Folk* as a cultural object in translation, focusing on the way the production side of the American remake appears as a site rife with subversion. The object, in this case, is not so much the form or content of the television series itself as the positioning of the remake as a cultural commodity in the American context. The remake, I argue, enhances the specificity of its representation of queer identity construction through a strategic practice of translation-as-simulation that simultaneously invokes and rebukes the traditional distinction between original and translation. Theorized by way of Bakhtin and the *Queer as Folk* remake, translation emerges as an ambivalent process of de- and reterritorialization whose direction can never be completely controlled. Transferred to the level of subjectivity, the subject is perceived as forever in translation, with each act of translation prompted by its inevitable encounters with alterity (other subjects and other principles of subjectivity).

In Chapter 7, I argue that the specificity of chronotopic identities and their translations renders them territorial. Identities, whether dominant or marginalized, all stake a political claim to a defined metaphorical or literal time-space, one that appears not as a safe haven, but as a site of contestation also claimed by other identities. However, to argue that all identities are territorial is not the same as presenting identities as rooted in, or authentically belonging to, a fixed space. My cultural object, London's Notting Hill Carnival in the 1970s and 1980s, stages a confrontation between, on the one hand, an established and dominant British identity and, on the other, an emergent black British identity. This confrontation concentrates on the struggle for control over the streets of the Notting Hill neighborhood. As represented in Linton Kwesi Johnson's poem "Forces of Victory" and Isaac Julien's film, *Territories*, this struggle situates both identities on the intersection among carnival, chronotope, and performativity, positing the concept of territory as the point of their political and material coagulation. Although territory is often associated with dominant, entrenched positions, the Notting Hill Carnival prompts me to reconfigure it as a fluid concept denoting localized processes of chronotopic contention.

Territory is first multiplied into territories, temporalized into de- and reterritorialization, and then made itinerant in the imaginations of particular communities. As such, territories are no longer the exclusive domain of the dominant order, but become capable of providing a strategically shifting ground for the political assertion of oppositional identities.

Finally, Chapter 8 introduces the novel concept of versioning as the most appropriate term for my project, its treatment of Bakhtin, and the intersubjective processes of identity construction and (re)assertion it advances. From a discussion of Johnson's dub poetry, versioning technology in computer science, and the metaphors of the sound system and the cutting room in *Territories*, versioning emerges as a theoretical concept denoting transformation, variety, and difference, as well as specificity, subjectivity, and similarity. It is a figure of repetition that works according to the logic of the turn: although the direction of this turn cannot be controlled or determined in advance, it is not entirely open either, since it is invariably bound to a particular chronotopic context in which only certain moves make sense.

I conclude this book by presenting identities as intersubjective processes of versioning. The subject appears as a collection of versions that can never be fully integrated, least of all by the subject itself. However, agency is preserved in the capacity to intervene intersubjectively in the performative reiteration of chronotopic identities and their corresponding regimes of seeing and speaking. Even if these regimes cannot be radically changed, they can be versioned and, by piling version upon version, more and more distance can be taken from the prescribed reiteration. Identities, then, no longer appear as static structures comprising a set of persisting characteristics, but as the dynamic interplay of intersubjectively constituted constraints and intersubjectively enacted reformulations. Between chronotope and versioning, identities appear as contextualized drafts or versions, each of which marks a specific, situated locus of simultaneous, interdependent constraint and agency. Identity remains "a practice of improvisation within a scene of constraint" (Butler 2004: 1) but, in their inherent, material intersubjectivity, both improvisation and constraint become radically specific and situated.