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Culture: The Elephant in the Room

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Abstract

A few decades ago, a field of research called *cultural studies* suddenly experienced a surge of interest. Why? There are many reasons why it is worth taking a closer look. At first glance, you might think it was simply a fad at the time. Fashions are an omnipresent phenomenon in science, as in all areas of contemporary activity. There, too, they serve to attract public attention with a newly used name and stimulating presentation, which is ultimately suitable for attracting research funding. But in the case of cultural studies, there is more to it than that: Embedded in the broad field of social sciences and economics, cultural studies initially represented a promise; the promise to bridge the gap that had arisen between the other, traditional sub-disciplines, to fill it with specifically understood content. It is this project, the more precise description of this empty space between the disciplines, where and why the latter have such abrupt, sharp boundaries and how cultural studies can become a bridge here that this paper is concerned with.

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Introduction

The traditional division of the social and economic sciences often distinguishes between at least three main sub-disciplines, which are often reflected in the structure of university teaching: Sociology, economics and political science. Certainly, a larger number of other sciences are also concerned with the topic of society - without a degree program in the study of history, the three fields mentioned would be without an object of investigation, without the epiphenomenon of law, a significant part of political science would be inexplicable, etc. - but a consideration of these three pillars of the social sciences is sufficient to develop the essential line of argumentation.

A suitable starting point for the discussion is René Descartes' understanding of science. The reason why his work is still praised today is basically a certain interpretation, namely that it is seen as a retreat of the scientific claim to insist on a certain method. In this view, science is precisely that research activity that uses means that correspond to a specific method. A retreat to the canon of instruments, on the other hand, leaves the choice of the object or phenomenon to be investigated completely open. It was precisely this pair of opposing characteristics that made Descartes' description of science so effective. It combined the greatest possible generality with regard to the objects of investigation with a concrete description of the scientific approach, the method.

A somewhat more thorough reception of the scientific method proposed by Descartes^[1] shows that he had a four-stage procedure in mind (see Descartes 1670, p. 31ff)^[10]: (1) eliminate all prejudices by means of doubt and determine what the doubtless elements are.

¹ The proposed method traces how Descartes himself sought to gain his insights, a description of this autobiographical dimension can be found in (Williams 1996).

(2) Break down - analyse - each of these elements as far as possible into smaller and smaller parts that are easier to understand. (3) Beginning with the simplest analytical particles, ascend to the stepwise new composition - to synthesis. (4) Once you have reached the highest level of synthesis, check whether the phenomenon that has now been reconstructed as a concrete thought system actually covers all the essential parts of its object of investigation.

Descartes' considerations were obviously modelled on his own preoccupation with mathematical theorizing. In contrast, the object of study "society" presents a somewhat different challenge. Beginning with the doubt to be cast on everything found (step 1), the very concept of "society" is problematic. Terms like this are always attached to the empirically observed, to the real. Adorno writes:

"In truth, all concepts ... refer to the non-conceptual, because they themselves are moments of reality that necessitate their formation - primarily for the purpose of mastering nature." (Adorno 1966, p. 23) [2].

But what is concretely perceived as society must, for reasons of clarity alone, be more strongly structured than, for example, the already highly abstract axioms of Euclid's mathematics. As long as the social sciences were young, as long as Auguste Comte could still innocently think of his sociology as a kind of physics of society and the British representatives of classical political economy could stagger along between practical political advice (Smith and Ricardo) and biological wisdom (Malthus), a division of labour in these sciences remained latent, and could at best only be determined by the individual personalities of the scholars. It was only towards the end of the 19th century that certain schools of social science began to disintegrate into the familiar sub-disciplines. From a historical distance, this disintegration also appears to a large extent as a reversal of Descartes' insinuated disintegration along their objects of investigation: it is the details of the methodological approach of the sub-disciplines that crystallize the rifts between them. The same object of investigation, "society", then looks different scientifically because the second step of Descartes' recipe, the analytical decomposition [2], is approached in different methodological ways. How this was accomplished in each case and where the limits of the respective approach came to light - limits at which the concept of "culture" intervenes - is the subject of the following sections.

Economy

Economic theory as it is understood today, as a separate social science, entered the scientific arena in 1874 with the *school of marginalism*. Leon Walras, Stanley Jevons and Karl Menger separated the political from the economic and created a general *economic* theory that could be formulated apart of any political organization of society. At first glance, the

methodological approach they choose seems to correspond to Descartes' methodological recipe: Society is conceived as broken down into its smallest particles, the individual human individuals - step 2 in Descartes. What is to be considered as genuinely economic must therefore be relocated to the internal modelling in the heads of every human being. And because it must be the same everywhere in this millionfold parallel existence in order to justify a definitively "economic" theory, it must be formulated as an innate psychic algorithm [3]. It is Jevons who particularly emphasizes this aspect. However, since ultimately a theory of society is to be provided again, i.e., a synthesis of the economic monads is required, a theoretical bond must be forged between them. Again, preferably one that is as unique and universally valid as the peculiar algorithm of a homo economicus. It is the mathematics teacher Walras who elegantly provides this linking element with his abstract model of a market mechanism. What is particularly remarkable about this thoroughly revolutionary approach is that the formal mathematical apparatus used was simply adopted from the successful and respected scientific discipline of physics, specifically from Newton and Leibniz. It is their limit value analysis, made possible by the invention of differential and integral calculus, which is now used with newly named variables to describe the network of people and companies connected by markets [4]. The resulting theoretical construct was quite complicated and probably only reached its preliminary conclusion with the general equilibrium model of Arrow and Hahn in 1967, see (Arrow 1972) [6].

Walras worked at a time when political life was still dominated by feudalism, the nobility and the church. He therefore rightly saw himself as a progressive theorist; the world his theory described had replaced the direct exercise of power with the operation of a market algorithm that treated all molecular entities equally. In this sense, Leon Walras was a *utopian socialist*; even the Nobel Prize winner Kenneth Arrow, who later completed his arguments, saw his own work as progressive.

In terms of the history of economic thought, however, the intervention of marginalism should be seen as a counter-revolution against Karl Marx's Hegelian-inspired class theory, quite the opposite of this self-assessment. Following classical British political economy, Marx understood society as a whole that changes dynamically over long periods of time, in which the behaviour of individuals follows predetermined paths that are significantly influenced by their class status. For him, the internal modelling of the people of a class, their self-consciousness, was class consciousness; a class consciousness that was not innate but, in the case of the exploited classes, had to be acquired with the help of progressive enlightenment. Their possible revolt against the exploiting classes is synonymous with gradual progress. In a slimmed-down form, Karl Marx's theory achieved considerable success in the 19th century, and the workers'

² A century after Descartes, Kant sharpened the distinction between analysis (step 2) and synthesis (step 3) by distinguishing between intra-linguistic "analytical judgments" and "synthetic judgments" that linked language and reality. Shortly after Kant, Hegel shifted the place of the repeated progression from analysis to synthesis from the mind of the scientist to the progress of reality per se.

³ The construct of such a homo economicus is a first compelling consequence of this methodological approach. Already here it becomes clear that the

sequence of Descartes' recipe is reversed: Step 1 (determining what is of interest) is *subordinated* to the requirements of step 2 (homo economicus).

⁴ The representative firm is introduced as isomorphic to the algorithm of homo economicus and linked to it. In both cases, optimization with limited resources is achieved by adjusting marginal changes in target values to the marginal change in the resources required to achieve them. The mantra of the mainstream economic theory of the 20th century - "optimization with scarce resources" - was thus taken directly from the formalisms of Newtonian mechanics.

leaders finally succeeded in building trade unions. Putting an end to this spook, at least in theoretical terms, banishing terms such as "class", "exploitation", "power" and "ideology" from theoretical discourse, was certainly a valuable achievement of the theory of marginalism for bourgeois self-understanding, for early bourgeois class consciousness^[5].

In an interesting partial contrast to Walras, Carl Menger, the third ancestor of marginalism^[6], recognized very early on that the mathematically elegant equalization mechanism that leads to "marginal benefit equals marginal cost" does not do justice to the special social performance of the bourgeoisie, the "moneyed aristocracy". The expectation of imagined additional benefits can, indeed must, exceed the expectation of additional costs in order to restore dynamism to the rise of an innovative bourgeoisie from Walras' static equilibrium. Friedrich von Wieser, Menger's student and later Schumpeter's teacher, passed on this line of thought^[7]. It is significant that Schumpeter, as a theorist of heroic entrepreneurship, was always dismissed by the mainstream of economic theory as a "footnote economist" because this approach eluded the usual formalization^[8], while on the other hand he was held in high regard by practically oriented entrepreneurial circles^[9].

Over the last 150 years, the mainstream of economic theory has become increasingly entangled in this ultimately unfruitful dead end. Even individual corrective measures, such as John Maynard Keynes' addition of the state as an actively intervening boundary condition, could contribute little to the adequacy of "pure" economics. The field that it can describe is *so narrowly limited because its own theoretical claim commands the use of theoretical means* (precisely that misunderstood social-scientific copy of Newtonian physics) that prohibit any thematization of communication processes, the dynamics of consciousness on an individual and class basis, and the associated power processes. None of this actually exists in the field of inorganic systems. If one subscribes to their formalisms - and incidentally overlooks the fact that even there the quantum mechanical revolution has occurred since 1905 - then one is *condemned to the production of complicated cloud-cuckoo houses*.

The financiers of theoretical economics can therefore only take comfort in the fact that this strand of theory directs potentially restless young minds onto dead tracks and renders them harmless there. Quality forecasting and economic policy advice can hardly be expected from this corner of the social sciences. Major crises appear there like unpredictable global economic storms; economic policy advice is limited to references to superficial accounting correlations, be they microeconomic or macroeconomic. The frustration with this kind of science was particularly acute in the wake of the global crises in the mid-1970s (end of fixed exchange rates, oil crises). Here we can recognize a motive for the emergence of a new theme: "culture", a term which, in its general mysteriousness, had already surrounded the unknown nature of the "cultural rebellion" of the generation of 1968 that had

just broken out^[10]. We will return to this later.

Politics

Political science is the sub-discipline of the social sciences that deals explicitly with the dynamics of power relations. The early contributions are therefore always dedicated to the preservation of power, e.g., or the stability of certain power distribution mechanisms (Montesquieu 1710)^[34]. The enforcement of more complicated power structures became most necessary where many people live in a confined space, i.e. in cities (hence the name "politics"), or where a change in the balance of power is imminent in a short period of time, i.e. in revolutions. In a famous passage on the subject of violence during in the context of primary accumulation, Karl Marx outlined the intertwining of economics and politics:

Violence is the midwife of every old society that becomes pregnant with a new one. It is itself an economic potency. (Marx 1867, p. 779).

It is therefore the pressure of economic conditions that leads to politics, to the cementing or shifting of power; just as, conversely, the political structure channels economic flows in calmer times and collapses when they become revolutionarily unstable. From this perspective, politics and economics are only two sides of the same process, which alternate in their visibility. Historically, too, the history of mankind obviously describes alternating periods of relative stability and revolutionary upheaval^[11]. In the former, economic oscillation prevails and violent politics is cast in its institutionalized forms, while in revolutionary periods politics takes over quite blatantly to create a new framework of a future economy.

In the light of Descartes' procedure, however, the separation of political science from political economy took a different course than that of economics. For modern political science, it took place somewhat later, following the catastrophe of the Second World War. After the exercise of direct feudal power was withdrawn from the ruling dynasties, the "republican" organization of power structures - at the times also known by different names, from "democratic" to "socialist" - became highly topical. In this sense, Kautsky's and Lenin's solution of organizing class interests in the form of a political party was trend-setting. The bourgeois associations of the pre-war period also quickly became modern political parties. As a result, political science concentrated on the blind spot of economic theory, namely how the corset of direct exercise of power - the institutionally and police-secured political system - could be stabilized or destabilized. To this end, political science had to rely primarily on practical and empirical experience that could be implemented quickly.

In the interwar period, it remained underdeveloped in Europe due to the difficult-to-explain success of the fascist parties. The Social Democrats had relied on a soft seizure of power through representation in state institutions - first nationalization and only then socialization - which was not

⁵ This dispute typically entered the bourgeois historiography in a disguised form, namely as a "methodological dispute" between a historically descriptive school and the mathematically adept marginalists. This excluded Marx's theory as well as the terms he used.

⁶ Today's conglomerate of so-called mainstream economics, which builds on marginalism, occupies the name "neoclassical theory" and is popularly - and often deliberately misleadingly - called "neoliberalism" by laypeople.

⁷ See also (Boos 1986, p. 49).

⁸ In (Hanappi 2014) it is shown how an up-to-date formalization that is more in line with the state of modern structural sciences could look like.

⁹ Compare (Hanappi 2012, 2015).

¹⁰ Compare (Hanappi, 2024a).

¹¹ See also (Hanappi and Scholz-Wäckerle 2017).

very ambitious in theory. The bourgeois parties were sucked into the stream of the fascist movement, one example being Austrofascism. Only the Jewish bourgeoisie – which rather arbitrarily was declared as mortal enemy by National Socialism - incorporated strategic political calculation into its instruments when it was able to emigrate as an emigrated (mainly left-wing intellectual) group in the USA or later as Zionism in Israel. The dramatic transformation from Lenin's state-toppling cadre party to Stalin's state-stabilizing party juggernaut eluded broad self-reflection. The practical measures to maintain power were too close and too brutal. A similar, albeit slower, process took place in China after the Communists seized state power in 1949. In fact, it was only with the bipolar division of the world after the Second World War that we can speak of a blossoming of modern political science. In terms of domestic policy, it referred to the measures taken by the nation state to maintain the system of integrated capitalism¹² and in terms of foreign policy to military policy strategies in the fight against "communism", by which the USSR and China were meant¹³.

The direct practical relevance of political science shortened its evolution in Descartes' scheme, it remains at step 1. In stark contrast to economic theory, it is the *narrowness of the short time horizon that determines the limit of knowledge gain* here, while in economics the eternal human striving for optimization with scarce resources forms the basis. Although this makes political science methodologically more open and more accessible to new methods (step 2 does not take place), it also makes it easier for it to be taken into service by currently powerful movements. The disintegration of the sub-discipline along the practical needs of political parties is reflected in the different understandings of the discipline according to various schools - from Anglo-Saxon new institutionalism¹⁴ to the training of statist personalities at Sciences Po in Paris to the social democratic interpretation of Wolfgang Abendroth's¹⁵ Marburg School.

It therefore seemed obvious for the youth revolt of 1968 to want to situate itself in terms of political science. The problem, however, was that the protagonists themselves were neither powerful nor seriously aiming to gain state power. It was not until the 1970s, when the cultural rebellion was already over, that the then forgotten Marxist theory was used on a broader scale. And even then, its political and economic depth remained unknown, disappearing beneath the surface of fashionable "confession". This will also be discussed below, under "Culture".

Sociology

It is a long way from Auguste Comte's vision of sociology to its conception by Max Weber in 1917. Weber lends itself to the search for clues, as he initially saw himself as both a national economist and a sociologist. The sociologist Weber practiced modesty with regard to the scientific value of sociology:

"All work that spills over into neighbouring fields, as sociologists, for example, must necessarily (! H.H.) do again and again, is burdened with the resigned awareness: that at best one provides the specialist with useful questions that he will not easily fall for from his specialist point of view, but that one's own work must inevitably remain highly incomplete." (Weber 1919, p. 482)

And because it is so imperfect, so the conclusion in Weber's advice for budding scientists, this work can only consist of casting one's own original ideas into hypotheses in ever more specialized sub-areas and testing them with empirically observed data. This is quite obviously the second step in Descartes' program, and quite obviously *only* the second step. Because the first step does not exist, the sociologist sits in principle between all stools and should - he is modest - even be happy about it, he can be proud precisely because of his renunciation. Weber says this even more clearly in relation to the omission of step 3 and step 4: these steps are about synthesizing the analytically dissected puzzle into an overall picture (step 3) and then, when looking at it from a somewhat greater distance, checking whether the picture is missing something or whether a piece is sticking out inappropriately to the side (step 4). Weber almost aggressively accuses these steps of being inextricably linked to "value judgments" - which he is right about - but which he condemns as fundamentally unscientific. The only scientific activity he praises (Descartes' step 2) seems to hang completely arbitrarily in the air, free of value judgments, but is of course by no means "objective". For every selection of a hypothesis to be tested from the enormous mass of possibilities naturally contains the implicit value judgment of the selector¹⁶. Only if he is inspired by Weber's unfortunate belief in objectivity will he not realize this himself, or worse still: realize it, but pretend objectivity to his audience.

In terms of methodology, this forefather of German-language empirical social research, commonly known as sociology, therefore set quite limited and restrictive guidelines: (German-speaking) sociologists should only formulate singular hypotheses and test them for the probability of their validity using descriptive statistics based on historical data and opinion polls. This remained the unexciting research program of a large part of German sociology.

Fortunately, however, an important group of young Frankfurt sociologists (Max Horkheimer, Theodor W. Adorno, Herbert Marcuse and others) had fled from Hitler to the USA in 1938, the so-called "*Frankfurt School of Sociology*". The remarkable thing about this school was that it developed an independent type of sociology that was very different from Max Weber's program. The representatives of this school often came to sociology with a philosophical and aesthetic approach that made a synopsis of singular phenomena indispensable from the outset. In addition, their "Journal for

¹² There were, of course, overlaps with Keynes' macroeconomics, in which state interventions were usually accompanied by so-called "regulatory measures", which could be attributed to the sphere of political science. On the concept of integrated capitalism, see (Hanappi 2019a).

¹³ For the second agenda mentioned, political science was able to draw methodologically on John von Neumann's theory of strategic games (Neumann 1944), which was originally a critique of neoclassical theory, see (Hanappi 2013).

¹⁴ Compare (March and Olsen 1984).

¹⁵ Compare (Abendroth, 1968).

¹⁶ The synthesis (step 3) of the analytically developed parts (step 2) is to a certain extent an answer to the problem area identified in step 1. However, wanting to give an answer to a question that seems socially relevant to the scientist is nothing other than the value of the scientist himself in the social context of the division of labour. Only unconscious scientists (unconscious apparatuses) do not need any idea of their own value, which they consequently carry into their work. This applies to all, but especially to social scientists.

Social Science" functioned as a meeting place for different European traditions, which were increasingly welded together into a left-wing intellectual collective by their common enemy, Hitler.

The Frankfurt School eschewed the scientific approach of Descartes. The representatives of this variant of sociology developed their own formats of presentation, their texts were sometimes not simply essays, texts on a topic, but became literary essays, literary feats, even, in the case of Adorno, their own philosophy of language^[17]. The claim to be science receded into the background. When the youthful revolt of 1968 reached its peak, such a reversal of the lofty claims of traditional science, its apparent return to the world of immediate perception of contradictions expressed in artistic creations, was clearly highly attractive. The works of the representatives of the Frankfurt School (Marcuse, Adorno, etc.) became the intellectual humus of the movement.

However, they remained excluded from the mainstream of sociology and were soon forgotten. The latter continued to work on the collection of hypotheses, each mathematically representable as an (empirically estimated) equation. They shied away from putting the equations together to form a model^[18] the economists did this anyway with their loan from physics. Sociologists provided lists of rather disparate individual arguments that could be used easily and in a variety of ways by politically interested parties. However, this did serious damage to the reputation of sociology as a science. In addition, the emerging criticism of its scientific nature led some sociological groups to feign the appearance of scientificity by using newly invented, inaccessible terminology. Stripped of its disguise, the insistence on step 2 of Descartes' procedure usually brought to light the familiar, which explains the habit of some specialists to declare the most boring topics as "exciting". More significant, however, is the gap between mainstream sociology and the other social sciences created by this self-limitation.

Culture: the rise, fall and future of an idea

This brief synopsis of the development of three central sub-sciences of the social and economic sciences should serve to outline the fault lines between them and, in particular, to show their respective limitations. It is no coincidence that the account of all three histories ends around the year 1970. As already mentioned, these were the years of a profound, worldwide cultural rebellion. From 1968 Stuart Hall was Director of the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies (CCCS) at the University of Birmingham, founded in 1964. In the midst of the cultural-revolution that was taking place, the field of cultural studies emerged around Stuart Hall. It was itself quite obviously a scientific correlate of the revaluation of all cultural values that was just taking root.

The term "culture" was anything but new at the time. In its everyday use, it usually referred rather vaguely to a collection

of behaviours that were distinguished from uncultured behaviour. It is illuminating in this respect that cultured was usually used synonymously with civilized. Only a civilized people developed culture was meant. The civil bourgeoisie had appropriated the style of courtly behaviour of the nobility and celebrated itself in the celebration of bourgeois culture. Anyone who did not have such a culture was either a "savage" in an underdeveloped country or part of the strata working under and for the bourgeois class. A large part of the "petty bourgeoisie" who felt obliged to bourgeois culture were not part of the ruling class in economic terms, they were only lent their consciousness in return for interest. For the somewhat more enlightened part of the cultured bourgeoisie, historically grown culture could also be granted to other "peoples" if necessary, even if this was always regarded as a lower level of culture. Above all, the masters of the 19th century, England's ruling class, still viewed their once global "cultural" colonial empire from above. However, after Hitler and the rise of the former colony USA as a Western hegemonic power, this was already highly anachronistic. And then the youth revolt broke out and unerringly called into question precisely that smorgasbord of bourgeois behaviours that could be used as a surrogate for the vanished (British) great power.

What the rebellious boys had to oppose their parents' generation could not be an economic uprising, as this was guaranteed by the income situation within the family. It therefore also made its way as a culture, as a counter-culture. Freedom from a specific economic class and from any country-specific historical tradition was the intoxicating aspect of the movement for the generation of 1968. The discovery of the research field of cultural studies, which illuminated very specific, directly experienced areas of life from this perspective, was a deliberate provocation of the old concept of culture. Suddenly there was such a thing as working-class culture, the culture of the soccer they played, the youth culture of the unemployed dockers of Liverpool who had produced the Beatles. The field of cultural studies was wide and completely open. It was an intruder in the development of the social sciences.

The youth revolt of the 1960s was initially above all practice, the practice of the young. However, every practice needs a theoretical background if it is to become established in the long term. Only practice with good theory can survive - and the youngsters were getting older. In the West, in particular, the theory that was being sought was the obvious contrast to the credo of the bourgeois world^[19], was pure "Marxism". Some somewhat older former members of communist parties, such as the philosopher Louis Althusser^[20] and the historian E. P. Thompson^[21], played an important role in this. In fact, however, it quickly became apparent that the dispute over the authority to interpret what "Marxism" was supposed to be in the 20th century - for example, Thompson had written his

¹⁷ Adorno proposes to overcome the inadequacy of concepts by combining them into so-called constellations: "*The determinable error of all concepts compels us to invoke others; therein arise those constellations*" (Adorno 2003, p. 62). For Adorno, constellations are works of art by the thinker, expressed in (philosophical) texts or in music, which circle around a treated reality in order to be precise. The origins of this approach in Hegel's thinking cannot be overlooked.

¹⁸ In part, the lack of systematization was covered up by the explicit announcement of being "systems theory". In the English-speaking world, Talcott Parsons should be mentioned here in particular, in the German-speaking world Niklas Luhmann, see (Parsons 1967) and (Luhmann 1984).

The frequently used adjective "complex", usually without a concrete definition, is a trademark of these schools of thought.

¹⁹ At times, there were also religious slips, such as the commitment to Hinduism, which document the prevailing theoretical helplessness.

²⁰ Compare (Althusser 1965), whose interpretation of Marxism was very influential in Parisian intellectual circles, but whose linguistically hermetically sealed abstractness never penetrated the practice of youth revolt.

²¹ Compare (Thompson 1978). His connection to the youth movement is documented by Sheila Rowbotham (Rowbotham 2001), among others.

book "The Poverty of Theory" as an attack on Althusser's theory - was unable to halt the decline of the youth revolt in the 1970s. The problem was probably that the concept of the interplay between the basis and superstructure of a society could only be found in the classical texts in a way that offered little insight into the current situation of youth rebellion.

With Stuart Hall and the style-defining cultural studies he brought to life, the Gordian knot of a correct Marxism^[22] is cut with the sword of a vague and broad understanding of the term "culture". The concept of culture "*no longer exists ... as the culmination of a developed civilization ... 'culture' in this particular sense, is something 'ordinary'*" (Hall 1999, p. 17). It is everyday life, the environment experienced at a manageable distance in terms of time and space, in which culture takes place - thus combining ideological superstructure and economic basis. However, culture is not merely an object to be observed in degree programs. In a Hegel-like phrase, Stuart Hall sees cultural studies as a dynamic process of changing power: "*I think the question of the politics of the cultural or the culture of the political comes very close to the concept or is at the center of cultural studies.*" (Hall 1989, p. 141). The pitfall of fleeing into a certain vagueness of the concepts used - for all their attractiveness in terms of keeping the debate in flux - is precisely that very attachment to locality and thus a certain arbitrariness as soon as it comes to more generally valid questions. Stuart Hall is rather sceptical of the incipient trend of (French) postmodernism, in which the political impotence of a free-floating arbitrariness ultimately manifested itself as a cultural fashion. In the England of the iron Lady Thatcher, he was one of the first to experience and theorize the new clout of the Conservatives, which was based on their emphasis on seemingly apolitical issues such as "culture" and "morality". Cultural Studies recommended taking up the fight on the battlefield of ideology - which the opponent had chosen - and allying with friendly troops: Multiculturalism. But politically and economically, the global progressive youth movement, now quite old, has been in a battle of retreat since the 1970s. The new concept of culture has almost disappeared again.

If there was anything that can give duration to this flash of a new concept of culture, it can be found in the bridges between and across the limitations of the individual sub-disciplines of the social sciences; at least that is the thesis of this paper. A recapitulation of these boundary lines, including Descartes' idea of science, can help in the search. *Economics* had not given up its claim to explain essentially all action in society; other subdisciplines were only authorized as modifying additions. To this end, it borrows the old theoretical apparatus of early 19th century physics for the analysis in Descartes' step 2 and shapes its determination of interest retrospectively for step 1, so that its axioms are exactly what it is interested in. The synthesis of step 3 can then be taken directly from physics; the result is general equilibrium, or equilibrium

growth paths, to which optimality properties can be ascribed. This also reveals the fundamentally affirmative character of the mainstream of economics: If the real world were as the model pretends, then the only task of economic policy would be to identify and eliminate disturbers of the general equilibrium. In principle, the implemented (fully privatized) general market economy would be the best of all possible worlds.

As already mentioned, the break between economics and political science manifests itself as the opposition of the time horizon: economic theory is rooted in the ultra-long-time horizon, the eternally repeated innate preferences of human individuals, which are brought to the continuously adapted^[23] optimum by an infinitely flexible market system. Empiricism has been ignored^[24], which also makes Descartes' fourth step (whether something has been forgotten from an empirical point of view) completely obsolete. Political science uses the already existing organizational forms of existing class relations, i.e. the political party system and its interaction in the short term, in an advisory capacity. It is fundamentally dependent on empirical observations and sacrifices any conceptual depth for their constant updating. Step 2 thus remains highly superficial and oscillates according to the fashions of the rapidly changing "political" topics of the day in step 1. This brings political science asymptotically closer to journalism.

The culture of cultural studies bridges this disparate juxtaposition by juxtaposing many local societies and describing their history "from below", from the everyday perspective of ordinary people. The commonalities, the general (which was an abstract implant in economic theory) thus become an intended particular in the sense of Karl Marx. An important step is thus taken towards incorporating and expanding ideological processes into the base-superstructure dynamic. The bridgehead to political science is created through the emphasis on historical science, which makes it possible to visualize the existing forms of organization as the results of long-term class struggles - including the emergence and demise of classes. By building this bridge, important phenomena (such as fascism) that were previously either ignored by the two sub-disciplines (in particular economics) or presented in an extremely abbreviated form (phenomenological political science) can be made more accessible^[25].

The magic word at the time of the emergence of "Cultural Studies" was the term "Crossroads". In 1997, an icon of the beat music of 1968, Eric Clapton, had founded the rehabilitation centre "Crossroads Centre Antigua" in Antigua; he himself had become capable of making a new start as a musician after severe drug addiction. The feeling of being at a crossroads after the last foothills of the youth movement had petered out, of having to decide to take a new direction, was a widespread feeling among the older progressive generation. As a no longer very young academic,

²² At the same time, John Lennon had already made fun of the flat symbolism of the Maoists in 1968: "But if you go carrying pictures of chairman Mao. You ain't going to make it with anyone anyhow." (Lennon 1968).

²³ "Exogenous shocks", such as the inexplicable occurrence of additional money supply or the influence of an institution such as a trade union, are a favourite toy of economic modelers. This justifies the adjective "adapted".

²⁴ As Wittgenstein aptly remarks at the end of his treatise: "What one cannot talk about, one must remain silent about." (Wittgenstein 1921). Since the language of the economy of general equilibrium has no words for expectation

errors and imbalances, it must remain silent about any kind of economic policy (the regulatory policy of perfect markets is tacitly assumed). If it postulates its language as the only possible economic language, this becomes a ban on speech for all those who want to describe the economy scientifically as an unbalanced process.

²⁵ See for example (Hanappi and Horak, 2000). In this paper it is also shown that formal methods - here still the classical analytical mathematics of economics - certainly fit into the research project of cultural studies.

the title of one of the early conferences of the British CCCR, namely "Third International Crossroads in Cultural Studies Conference", was therefore immediately attractive to me. It promised a new transdisciplinary approach to understanding and changing contemporary problems ^[26]. An approach that on the one hand did not deny its roots in Marxist theory, but at the same time wanted to break new, more open ground ^[27] together with Roman Horak, we contributed a paper to this conference. Just two years later, the CCCR's financial support was withdrawn for political reasons and, despite its universally acknowledged success, it disbanded. Eric Clapton continued to pursue the idea of the fruitfulness of greater diversity, i.e. the "Crossroads", and began the famous "Crossroad Guitar Festivals" in 2004 ^[28]. In more specialized cultural areas, the bridging of one-sided cultural history through a new beginning with diversity as a basis - i.e. "Crossroads" - cannot be overturned.

The dividing lines between dominant sociology and economics and political science reveal the Janus face of dominant sociology, as already announced by Max Weber. In the face of economics, one serves oneself by testing hypotheses and providing an arsenal of unrelated correlations between empirically measured variables. The prevailing economic theory should take what fits into its "world view", what does not fit remains without being given any meaning in a unifying overall view. Sociology's storage room of useless (unfalsified) hypotheses is full to bursting. The false *modesty* of sociology, its apparent pluralism ^[29], its rejection of the validity of a coherent group of *essential* hypotheses for society as a whole, is one side of this Janus-faced head - precisely that which it turns to economics. The other side of the Janus head turns to political science and has also already been argued by Weber in a very vehement form: 'Completely *immodestly*, prevailing sociology forbids partisanship of science and insists on the primacy of objectivity. This stands in contrast to the approach of political science, whose object of investigation is precisely the dynamics of clashing political partisanship, a task that necessarily involves political science itself as part of this dynamic, especially from a short-term perspective. The claim to act objectively is an obviously obsolete dictate, especially for political science. In his day, Max Weber still had the "catheter socialists" in his sights, who adhered to Friedrich Engels' mission "The development of socialism from utopia to science", see (Engels 1880). In times in which political science degenerates into journalism, this claim degenerates into a demand for "quality journalism".

The young cultural studies offered both fronts of the dominant sociology. Their Marxist heritage prevented them from selling out to the seemingly only closed model, the model of neoclassical theory to explain the world, while on the other hand, their local attachment to everyday hardships, the degree program of their historical genesis, quickly made any thought of objectivity fade. These were precisely the

reasons for the popularity of the CCCS, indeed the renaissance of the term "culture" per se. Behind the supposed narrowing down to this newly used term lay a process of renewed standardization of the social sciences. Although this was only a rudimentary process, filling the cracks between the social sciences, it was nonetheless promising the rise of the term "culture".

With the long retreat of progressive currents in the real political-economic landscape, which began in the 1980s after the capitalist state apparatuses ^[30] took over the "cultural" instruments of influence, the term "culture" also fell into decline and cultural studies also degenerated in the long term. When images of radically conservative political actors such as Margaret Thatcher, Ronald Reagan and Helmut Kohl are beamed at the population via all media channels, the space for counterculture becomes ever narrower. Even local interpretation schemes are becoming less and less important as TV society's newsroom has moved into the living room. Communication between people on the ground, the humus of local culture, could not withstand the pressure of centrally generated opinion delivery.

But even the decaying forms of cultural studies are revealing. Postmodernism, already observed with ambivalent feelings by Stuart Hall, proved to be one of the greatest dead ends. In it, a willy-nilly strolling diaspora of former social critics celebrates itself as destroyers of grand theories and prophets of a new flatness. The aestheticization of impotence has always been a welcome reservoir for nameless frustration. Postmodernism can now be safely ignored by the usual scientific establishment of the social sciences; as another junk room of sociological aberrations, it hardly bothers anyone. The show of the three sub-disciplines continued unhindered in its old ways.

It was the great global economic crisis of 2008 that brought some movement to the scene. In its wake, there was a revival of the term "culture", but this time as an ideological weapon of right-wing politics in the global North in the fight against refugees from the global South - this applies to both the USA and Europe. The "foreign culture" as an ideological enemy was nothing new; classical fascism had already made extensive use of it ^[31]. Now, too, the invocation of culture is directed at small local communities, but remains vague in its insinuation of a homeland on this side of the television screen - the global interdependence of the cultural goods industry can hardly be denied - but also highly concrete in the brash invention of seemingly national culture. The vision of culture of the '68 generation, which was a global vision of humanism affecting all of humanity, is thus turned on its head.

If the world disintegrates into isolated television rooms in small villages where participation in global world events takes place through nationalist sermons, then the anchoring of culture in the local turns into its opposite, namely alienation and the search for a substitute identity by means of nationalist symbols. This is how the operators of nationalist

²⁶ Stuart Hall was joined by plenary speakers from South Africa, Venezuela, Taiwan and the USA.

²⁷ In the introduction to the book "On Ideology", published by the CCCR, it is stated: "If cultural studies as a large and progressive body of work does not preclude the development of a systematic Marxism within it, then its necessary methodological generality does not always encourage it - at least *theoretically*." (Schwarz 1977).

²⁸ In this benefit concert, Clapton united musicians of different styles, from John McLaughlin to Carlos Santana and ZZ Top. Clapton's "Crossroads

Guitar Festival" idea in music lives on to this day; in 2019 the festival took place in Denver, and in 2024 it was held in the Royal Albert Hall in London.

²⁹ The pluralism is *apparent* because de facto the dominant economic theory selects and this is very well anticipated by the producers of the sociological hypotheses.

³⁰ The term goes back to Althusser (Althusser 1977). Roland Barthes, for example, described very early on how the new technological possibilities also played a decisive role (Barthes 1964).

³¹ See also (Hanappi 2019b, 2019b).

politics generate their base.

Finally, reference should be made here to the process of European unification. It is precisely this process that the right-wing movements in Europe want to put a stop to by emphasizing, and usually even creating, "national culture". The EU has reacted to this by developing the research field of "European Studies"; in a certain sense, another manifestation of the disintegration of cultural studies. The creation of a European continental identity by means of a more detailed degree program of the different cultural phenomena within Europe can certainly be a scientific approach in the sense of Descartes. The question of interest (step 1), i.e. the emergence of continental identity, is examined in simpler parts through analytical dissection (step 2). However, drawing summarizing conclusions from this (step 3) is only informally envisaged in the current EU programme. The remaining steps are therefore awaiting implementation, or rather programmatic financial support. Whether this will happen has become more and more unlikely in recent years. The war in Ukraine and the accompanying, centrally orchestrated war propaganda in Europe's mass media has revealed that the top layer of the European Union is mainly a vassal of the global military strategy of the USA. If there is hope for an emerging European identity at all, then such a transition could eventually happen through the dying off of the old generation of EU policy-makers and the descendants of the part of the young generation that has already been socialized in a pan-European context. For this to happen, however, such an institutionalized context must be stabilized, or rather created and expanded - against the resistance of nationalists. As the elections in 2024 show, nationalist and fascist movements are successfully trying to drag the less educated youngsters on their side. This is particularly true in some former Stalinist states in Eastern Europe. There the disappointed 'American Dream' after 1990 has made nationalist visions more attractive again. This is where European politics comes into play: What has to be promoted are visions for global solutions^[32]. The population base to be approached might consist of a mixture of the very young, e.g. generation Z, and those who experienced visions of uniting nations half a century ago, e.g. generation 68. Culture remains a vague concept for the time being. But this should not obscure the fact that it is precisely vague terms that describe a vague feeling most precisely. Any definition that is too specific would be misleading and further off the mark. The scientific use of such terms often goes round in circles for a long time; even in physics, the term "warmth" was the subject of a long struggle. Europe's cultures in particular are still only a laboratory for meticulous degree programs; the great syntheses are yet to come. This requires a synthesized social science, which in turn requires a methodological revolution in economic theory, a reorientation of sociology as a "critical theory"^[33] and a merging of economics and political science into a renewed political economy^[34]. The discussion of these tasks goes far beyond the scope of this paper. Perhaps the challenge of the

upcoming synthesis of the social sciences, as it emerges from the oscillation between meticulous analysis and grandiose attempts at synthesis, can also be supported by filling the *concept of culture* with new content^[35] and this comes directly from real contradictions and struggles.

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³² An important catalytic element for the youngest generation is the climate catastrophe and the still lingering danger of pandemics, which require global measures to overcome them. See also (Hanappi, 2020, 2022, 2024b).

³³ This is how the Frankfurt School described its theoretical approach; certainly, also because Marx had already called his work "Critique of Political Economy" and not just "Political Economy". In both cases, Hegel's insistence on negation, or the primacy of doubt as the only undoubted thing

in René Descartes, is behind this. The source of this basic idea has not dried up to this day.

³⁴ Compare (Hanappi and Scholz-Wäckerle 2017).

³⁵ Bourdieu's attempt to establish 'cultural capital' only as an additional dimension of capital clearly falls short of being a creative new conceptualisation (Bourdieu, 2021). It only combines good will with mainstream standard economic methodology.

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