

**DOING**

**SECOND EDITION**

**CULTURAL STUDIES**

**THE STORY OF THE SONY WALKMAN**

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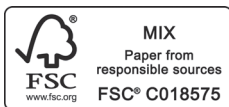
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# INTRODUCTION TO THE SECOND EDITION

## 1 SETTING THE SCENE

Do you know what a personal cassette player is? If you do, you will probably remember the Walkman. Although the name is a brand of the Sony corporation, it became synonymous in the 1980s and 1990s with the personal cassette player, in much the same way as the brand name Hoover became associated with ‘vacuum cleaner’ and that of Xerox with ‘photocopying’ in earlier times. If you were young in the early 1990s, the chances are you had a ‘Walkman’, and if you are too young ever to have had one, then you may well have come across one in your parent’s house, in a second-hand store, or seen one in a film, TV series or magazine from the 80s and 90s. For a time, the Walkman seemed to be everywhere. Being without one was being out of the loop. Not knowing about it was being from another planet. How so, you may well ask? Well, the Walkman is generally credited with making recorded music portable in a new way, allowing its users to immerse themselves in private worlds of entertainment in public – on the metro, in the bus, or on the beach, for instance. It was regarded as shifting the boundaries between the public and the private, and it helped spark new consumption patterns that challenged some of the traditional practices of the music industry. For a time, the Walkman was regarded as a crucial new development in modern culture. Whether it was a liberating device or the symbol of an antisocial youth-culture was, however, a controversial issue. Some commentators saw it as a personally enabling technology, shifting recorded music out of its confines of the home and other demarcated spaces, whereas others saw it as an individualizing, egocentric ‘menace to society’. These are big claims about a small device, but they illustrate the kind of debates about the trajectories of modern cultural practice that attached themselves to the Walkman and came to be exemplified through it.

Looking at these discussions from the perspective of the present they may seem remarkably dated to you. It would not be surprising if you are reading this introduction on a tablet, in a tube with your headphones on. But it would be quite surprising if anybody questioned your right to do so. Bringing a mobile device into a public setting is no longer controversial, and if you happen to read a tablet on a train, there is a good chance that your fellow travellers are engaged in similar practices themselves – texting, surfing, blogging. The tablet you are reading on will, furthermore, be different from the Walkman in many ways. Listening to music is only a fraction

of the possibilities that the interface of a tablet provides you with, and a central difference to the Walkman is that most of these applications allow you to connect to the Internet. In that sense they do not represent a refuge in a private world of entertainment as the Walkman was represented as so doing. On the contrary, they indicate that you are potentially connected to an immense world of information that did not even exist at the time of the Walkman. The tablet will also not bear the name of Sony. When it comes to contemporary mobile devices Apple dominates the game. It differs from Sony by being a distinctive American company that has its identity rooted in the garages of Silicon Valley, rather than in a Japanese corporate and design culture, as was the case with the Walkman. In other words; if the Walkman was the quintessential example of a modern mobile device in the 1980s and 90s one could argue that iPhones and iPads have taken over this role in the present.

This brings us neatly to the million dollar question. Why read a book about the Walkman if your cultural world is dominated by new, interactive mobile devices? Is there anything more than a trip down memory lane to be gained from reading on? We think there is. Reflecting on the present by looking to the past is an exercise that forces you to put your assumptions about your own cultural practices up for critical scrutiny. Comparing the Walkman with devices such as the iPhone enables you to pinpoint the cultural practices that are uniquely tied to contemporary technologies, but it also opens your mind to potential similarities between seemingly different cultural artefacts in different times. On closer inspection, discussions about the Walkman might not seem quite so alien to you. Or perhaps they remain alien even after you have thought carefully about them. But no matter whether you are inclined to think that cultural practices are always repeating themselves, or that culture is in constant flux, you will find yourself challenged to defend your position over the next 200 pages or so. Comparing the cultural practices associated with the Walkman with the practices related to modern Web-based mobile devices reveals both continuities and changes in the ways such technologies have been represented, identified with, produced, consumed and regulated, and the way they have been discussed in the media as well as in academic debates within the cultural and social sciences.

The identification and conceptualization of such continuities and changes is central to this second edition of *Doing Cultural Studies*. While the main text resembles the original 1996 edition, we have added a number of what we term 'Back to the Future' (BTF) boxes where the original text surprised us as readers in 2013. These boxes introduce new readings and pose new (and some very old) questions that will hopefully make you benefit from the comparative potential that reading a 15-year-old text provides you with. Indeed, this comparative potential was the core motivation for revising the book at a time where the uptake of new mobile devices is booming. Juxtaposing the Walkman with such devices sparks many interesting questions about the role of such technologies in the assembling of contemporary cultural practices and the organization and reproduction of the cultural industries, for instance. Are the stories about personal geniuses like Steve Jobs and Mark Zuckerberg, for example, a new phenomenon or do they bear a remarkable similarity to the ways in which Akio Morita and the management team at Sony were represented? Does the connection to the Web make new devices so very different

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from the Walkman in terms of their influence on modern cultural practice? Does the fact that you leave digital traces while using them pose different questions about regulation? Does the possibility of crowd-sourcing lead to different relations between producers and consumers of cultural artefacts today?

These are just a few of the themes that the BTF boxes will raise throughout the book, and each of them is supported by new theoretical and substantive readings to assist you in thinking their implications through. We have chosen to structure this revised version of the Walkman book in this way because we believe that historical comparison is a central method of analytical thinking and that the original text has a huge potential in fostering this form of thinking in new generations of students within the field of cultural studies. Most crucially such comparison will assist you in avoiding some of the pitfalls of the field – the rock of anachronism and the hard place of epochalism, for instance, where present concerns are projected onto the past, thereby robbing the latter of its own specificity, or where the present is deemed so new and so different from what existed before, that the past is in effect consigned to the dustbin of history, as an irrelevance. Going through the exercises in the book will give you practical experience with historical comparative methods while at the same time allowing you to think about some of the cultural conundrums of the present through an engagement with its central material devices. In going back and forth between the old text and the new exercises you will be challenged to evaluate the usefulness of the central analytical models and concepts that the original Walkman book proposed, in particular, the notion of the ‘circuit of culture’.

So what exactly is this notion, and why might it be useful for undertaking a cultural study of a material device such as the Walkman, or indeed, of the iPod or iPad? Well, as the original Walkman book suggests, for a long time the analysis of cultural products within parts of the social and human sciences focused heavily on processes of production, with the implication that the mode of production of such artefacts was a prime determinant in the manner in which they were ‘encoded’ with particular meanings and uses. The Walkman book suggested that while such processes were not of themselves unimportant, they were not the be all and end all of an analysis of any material cultural artefact. Rather, the text introduced a theoretical and methodological model based on the articulation of a number of distinct practices and processes whose interaction could and did lead to variable and contingent outcomes that couldn’t be taken for granted ‘in advance’, in an a priori manner. Thus, rather than focusing exclusively on one single aspect of the ‘life’ of an artefact, the book instead proposed that it was in the articulation of a number of non-reducible practices that the beginnings of an explanation, account, or ‘story’ could be surfaced (see page 37). This ‘model’ has been an influential framing device in the field of cultural studies ever since it appeared in the original Walkman book (and, anyway, the original text borrowed and elaborated the notion from others working in the field, most notably Richard Johnson, as the original introduction makes clear. See page xxvii). It is basically a *relational* model that focuses on the interplay between practices of regulation, consumption, production, identity-work and representation in the assembling or putting together of contemporary material cultural artefacts. The circuit of culture will be introduced in more detail later in the book, but, as we say, a central aim of this book is to

enable you to critically reflect on this model by exploring its explanatory power or reach in relation to examining the practices attached to the mobile devices we use now; in other words, their place in how we live now, and just how new and different that ‘now’ is (or is not) from the ‘now’ of the Walkman.

In approaching the original Walkman text we have ourselves been stimulated to discuss the strengths and weaknesses of the ‘circuit’ in today’s context. Broadly we think that it still has some heuristic value (it was, as we shall explain shortly, first and foremost a pedagogic device). This is not to say that it can be used in exactly the same way as in 1996. Much may have changed since then, and one example is the way the interplay between consumers and producers is assumed to have altered as a result of the emergence and influence of such techniques and practices as ‘user-driven innovation’ and ‘prosumption’. However, even though the dynamics of the interplay may have altered, it is interesting that the existence of such an interplay (the idea developed in the book of ‘mutual constitution’) was already articulated in the 1996 edition. Going through the book we found many instances where detailed discussions concerning the relations between the different ‘moments’ in the circuit required a tweak, but we still found the model heuristically useful as an organizing device to think with. Whether or not you agree with this conclusion should be clear to you after having read the book and engaged with the BTF boxes. If you find the ‘circuit of culture’ to be of use in analysing today’s cultural artefacts and practices, you will have developed some arguments and empirical evidence for this stance. This will give you a solid foundation for using it in a reflective way in your future studies. If, on the other hand, you find parts of the model dated (theoretically and substantively) you will be able to point to the specific empirical and conceptual discussions in the BTF boxes that lead you to this conclusion. This will put you in a stronger position to revise the model, or maybe abandon it altogether, and suggest potentially more productive ways of approaching the materials at hand.

After all, not only have the materials we are exploring here changed, our conceptual vocabulary has altered quite substantially too. The original book was written as an introduction not only to a material cultural artefact, but to an exploration of that artefact through the lens of that interdisciplinary constellation of theories known collectively as the ‘cultural turn’ (the turn to signifying practices, discourse, language). So, when you read the book, you should not only consider substantive continuities and changes between the cultural practices attached to the material devices analysed, but also consider the ways in which those practices are themselves theorized. Does the conceptual vocabulary deployed in the book still hold explanatory water, or have there been theoretical developments that have fundamentally or partially problematized the assumptions undergirding the cultural turn (such as renewed interest in materiality, for instance)? The following sections of this introduction will cover this theoretical and substantive ground in a little more detail in order to help you approach the text in the potentially most productive way for your studies. Now, though, let’s take a trip back to 1996 and briefly explore why and how the Walkman book was originally written, and the manner in which it was subsequently received and used.

## 2 THE MAKING OF THE BOOK AND ITS RECEPTION

The Walkman book was the product of an Open University course, *Culture, Media and Identities*. The course, which ran for around a decade from the mid-late 1990s (but whose construction was in the making from the early 1990s) was designed to offer a sociologically inflected introduction to the interdisciplinary field of cultural studies, in general, and to the main constituent elements of that cluster of theories and methods known collectively as the ‘cultural turn’ that was then sweeping the social and human sciences. As the team responsible for making the course (which, as with any OU course at that time involved not only centrally and regionally based Open University academic staff, but also OU designers, editors, BBC producers, and a number of academics from other universities and related institutions) was well aware that most of the students approaching the course would have little to no prior background knowledge of cultural or media studies, and that much of the material they would encounter was quite challenging in its theoretical complexity, they decided that it would be important to try and provide a ‘hook’ in the opening weeks of the course. This hook should gently immerse the student body in the main themes and issues ‘in miniature’ as it were, through a case study of a material cultural artefact. The aim was to design a text (and associated audio-visual materials, study guides and so forth) which would outline the key organizing themes of the course – cultural representation, identity/difference, production, consumption, and regulation – through a particular case study. By seeing how the course ‘logic’ was operationalized in relation to a specific object, it was hoped that this introductory text would offer students a road map they could hold on to, and continually refer back to, as they made their way through their studies.

From this ambition, the Walkman book was born. It needs to be emphasized, then, that the text was designed first and foremost with a distinctive pedagogic aim in mind. It had no grander ambition than that. It was and is a textbook, if one of a rather particular sort. Its particularity resides, perhaps, in the fact that the object chosen was not one which had received a great deal of academic attention at that point, and thus that a considerable amount of research needed to be undertaken in order to generate the detail that would be necessary to talk plausibly about it in relation to the main aims and objectives of the course. A great deal of debate and discussion took place among the course team concerning the best object to focus upon given the task at hand. At various points, the television, the telephone, and the PC, for example, were considered for the ‘case study’. The team, however, felt that these objects had been so much analysed from so many different perspectives that it would be extremely difficult to do justice to them in the space allotted to the case study within the overall course schedule. The Walkman, by contrast, had the advantage of being a very discrete entity, one subject to much popular discussion and debate (and moralizing), but little academic analysis. It was a case which the team felt, intuitively, had the potential to offer an intriguing and productive case that could carry the themes of the course ‘in miniature’.

Once the Walkman case had been decided upon, responsibility for making it ‘work’ for the course was devolved to a small team comprising Paul du Gay, Stuart Hall, and Hugh Mackay (OU

academic members of the course team), the OU course manager, Linda Janes, and an external academic consultant, Keith Negus, from Goldsmith's College, London. Over the course of several months, this team amassed almost everything that had ever been written about the Walkman, in English, instigated a project with photography students at an art college to furnish the text with images of 'the Walkman in use', and began the process of organizing the materials at hand in relation to the key themes of the course. It was from this that the framing device of 'the circuit of culture' emerged. Each member of the team was given responsibility for one or more 'moment' of the circuit, and the process of constructing a basic narrative ('the story of the Sony Walkman') began. It was quickly evident to the team that doing justice to these 'moments' in relation to the Walkman case, and indeed, to the Walkman itself as an artefact, would require additional research, including, if possible, access to archival materials, at Sony's European advertising agents, for example, as well as interviews with senior executives at Sony responsible for the design and production of the device, for instance. It is testament to the unique collaborative nature of the OU course team process, and the wide range of expertise it can draw upon, including collaborations with the BBC, that the preparation of a textbook was able to include so much detailed research, derived from so many different locales across the world. Without this, it is unlikely that the Walkman text would have been able to achieve whatever explanatory reach it is deemed to possess.

The final text appeared at the end of 1996, just in time for the first cohort of students embarking on *Culture, Media and Identities*. It became clear to the team during the first year of the course's life that the decision to outline the course in miniature through the Walkman case text had achieved its main objective: to provide students with a hook they could hold on to as they progressed through their studies. The relational model of the circuit of culture and the level of detail provided by the Walkman materials seemed to work well together pedagogically, and the team found students continually invoking the text as they proceeded through the various parts of the course. To this extent, the Walkman as pedagogic road map was deemed a real success within the OU. What the team did not foresee, however, was the manner in which the book would be received outside the confines of the OU. Because the team was centrally focused on its pedagogic core task of providing a means of making complex materials approachable for OU students new to them via an (empirically plausible) case study, little time was spent on thinking about any wider impact (though our publishers, Sage, were, of course, concerned with this issue). It soon became clear, however, that the text was being taken up and used in a variety of disciplinary and interdisciplinary domains, some quite far removed from its presumed home contexts of sociology and cultural and media studies. Among the most notable of these were: cultural and economic geography, social anthropology and material culture studies, science and technology studies, design studies, popular music studies and management and organization studies. Interestingly, in these and other areas, the Walkman volume was not simply used as a textbook, but was frequently approached as a research text as well. Its capacity to travel and to be readily appropriated into theoretical and substantive debates at a number of different levels in such a wide variety of fields requires some sort of explanation. One plausible reason for its take off relates to the burgeoning interest in the cultural turn sweeping the social and human sciences, and the humanities, at the



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time of the book's release. In providing an introduction to some of the key theories and methods associated with this turn through an empirical examination of a particular artefact, the text was able to generate a degree of reach across disciplinary and interdisciplinary fields, all of whom in one way or another were grappling with (taking up, critically engaging with, rejecting) the implications of this 'turn' for their own disciplinary and interdisciplinary matters of concern. Thus the text seemed to speak to sociologists increasingly interested in 'mobilities', to scholars in STS, social anthropology and material culture studies exhibiting a renewed interest in questions of 'materiality', to management and organization scholars focusing on organizational culture, marketing and branding, and to economic geographers and political economists exploring 'cultural economy'. It also generated a range of reviews in both popular and academic media which again indicated the wide variety of concerns to which the text was able to speak. The book was both praised for its ability to offer a model for undertaking 'relational research' relevant to developments in a range of fields – with particular focus on the circuit of culture in this regard – and damned for exactly the same reason – providing a one size fits all frame that reduced complex and contingently related phenomena to a few moments on a preformatted circuit. The text was slated for its political naivety, not least by some political economists in cultural studies, who saw it as bordering on a hagiography of a capitalist corporation (Sony); while others saw it as offering an exemplary 'pragmatist' approach that avoided too many a priori normative assumptions about its object (one French scholar describing it as an 'STS text manqué', for instance). For the course team responsible for producing it, it felt odd indeed to find a modest textbook having such expectations placed upon its slender shoulders; and not least to find its central pedagogic device (the circuit) becoming the subject of intense debate concerning its status as a model for doing cultural research, or indeed, its failure so to do. To emphasize again, the Walkman is and was a textbook and should be approached as such, both in its original and revised version.

Whether the central theoretical and substantive concerns that the original Walkman text focused upon and explored are still as pertinent today as they were when it was originally written are of course interesting questions. This second edition of the book is designed in large part to assist you in productively posing and thinking about these questions. We have deliberately eschewed providing any clear-cut answers, but have instead sought to frame the new edition as a running commentary on the original text, not least through the use of the BTF boxes, and their associated readings and exercises. Clearly, as we have already indicated, contemporary interactive, digital, mobile devices are significantly different from their stand-alone predecessors in many important respects. Just how new and different is an interesting question, one that requires both empirical and conceptual examination. The current text seeks to provide you with some resources to aid such an examination. Along the conceptual dimension, for instance, the 'cultural turn', like its near cousin 'social constructionism', has increasingly lost its foothold in the upper echelons of the theoretical hierarchy of the social and human sciences over the last few years, as many of its key tropes became widely adopted, their use more formulaic, and hence subject to considerable critique.

At the same time, as would be expected, other theoretical and methodological approaches have risen to prominence, and a number of these have done so on the back of their critical engagement

with the conceptual constituents of the cultural turn, as well as their own capacity to offer new and interesting insights into understanding cultural and social life. Developments such as the ‘turn to materiality’ and the turn to ‘practice’, for instance, seek to move away from a focus on culture, discourse and signification, and instead focus first and foremost upon the analysis of material practices. Though there are as many different and non-reducible strains to these developments, they are linked by a problematization of the term ‘culture’ (and indeed the term ‘social’) as this has been deployed in analyses framed by the theoretical assumptions of the cultural turn, not least those deriving from post-structuralism. Though in some loose sense ‘practice’ is seen as broadly ‘cultural’, the extent to which the term culture is appropriate to an analysis of practice remains uncertain, or a point of debate in these approaches. The ways in which these new turns intensify, supplement or challenge the theoretical focus on texts, discourses and signifying practices that characterized the cultural turn will be a topic of debate throughout the BTF boxes. Again, we seek only to assist you in thinking about these issues, not least by including some readings and related exercises that pose the issues as clearly as possible. In particular, we focus on some of the claims and approaches undertaken by advocates or representative voices of the ‘material turn’, and more specifically the analytical lens provided by Actor-Network Theory (ANT).

ANT is an approach initiated in the mid- to late-1980s by Bruno Latour, Michel Callon and John Law, and it has been highly influential in emphasizing the need for taking material artefacts seriously as part of the way we understand and explain cultural practices (such as our use of mobile devices). One of Latour’s classic essays, ‘Technology is society made durable’, is included as a new reading because it provides an accessible explanation of the ANT approach and some of its key concepts. A central concept is that of an ‘actant’. Whereas other social theories have used the word ‘actor’ to denote agents that act intentionally in a social world, Latour prefers the concept of actants because it highlights that action can be attributed to non-humans. The concept of actants allows for thinking about non-humans as actors in and of themselves and not the hapless bearers of symbolic projection (they are not simply ‘representations’, in other words, or signifiers). An actant is not defined in terms of intentions or meaning-horizons but rather in terms of whether or not it modifies a state of affairs by making a difference. If an entity makes a difference in the course of some other agent’s action and if there are ways of empirically detecting this difference then it falls under the concept of an actant. This allows for thinking about action as a phenomenon that is distributed between human and non-human actants that are assembled in so-called ‘actor-networks’.

You will be asked to reflect on Latour’s text in the BFT boxes and by reading it with and against the Walkman text, you may be able to glean a basic sense of how the material turn would approach the objects and relations explored in the text, and how and if they differ fundamentally from the approaches associated with the cultural turn. For now it is sufficient to state the point that Latour’s focus on materiality has been seen as a challenge to the cultural turn. As we have said, whether you agree that ANT provides a radically different approach than the one associated with the cultural turn will be more clear to you after you have been through the book and its exercises.

## 3 REVISITING THE CIRCUIT OF CULTURE FROM THE PRESENT

After this brief reflection on the original motivations for writing the Walkman book and its subsequent reception it is time to return to the present. In fact, this movement back and forth in time is at the core of the structure of the book. As we mentioned earlier, we have included the BTF boxes to challenge you to put the original text into context and help you to situate the circuit of culture in today's empirical and theoretical environment. The boxes will primarily do this by addressing three themes that we have identified as central in relation to evaluating the extent to which the technological and theoretical developments of the last 15 years or so have influenced the contemporary usefulness of the model. These three themes are

- The boundary between the public and the private as a basis for regulation
- The interrelation of production, consumption and identity
- Representation in a digital world.

By challenging you to discuss these themes the BTF boxes will lead you to revisit all five elements of the circuit of culture. The first primarily addresses the moment of regulation, the second touches upon relations of consumption, production and identity-work, and the third and final one asks you to reflect on the question of representation. We will introduce each of these themes in turn and provide examples that illustrate why we think they may prove a useful starting point from which to evaluate the circuit of culture; not only in terms of its fit with ongoing empirical and substantive developments in the world of mobile technologies, but also in relation to its explanatory usefulness when compared with theories that have begun to enter and reframe the field of cultural studies in recent years, such as those associated with the turn to practice, and ANT, for example.

### 3.1 The boundary between the public and the private as a basis for regulation

Almost every new information technology has ignited discussions about and instigated material changes in the boundaries between what is considered to be public and that which is deemed to be private. The introduction of the landline telephone in the late nineteenth century is a good example of this dynamic. To you it may seem like an uncontroversial and neutral technology, but at the time of its introduction it sparked heated debate about the way it influenced existing boundaries between the public and the private. Telephone operators were suddenly containers of knowledge about private gossip and they had the power to direct the voices of strangers into private homes. The existence of telephone operators as an occupation accordingly had implications for settled

social hierarchies and distinctions between the private and the public. These dramas around the introduction of the landline may no longer appear very salient to our contemporary concerns, so there are good reasons why you have probably never thought of your parents' old landline as controversial. Telephone operators seem on the face of it to be largely a thing of the past (though the practices of call centre operatives may make even that statement somewhat debatable) and modern phones rarely leave you in much doubt as to who is calling you. But the example of the telephone proves how communication technologies can challenge distinctions between the public and the private and give rise to discussions about regulation. This is no different with modern technologies, and whereas you may not have thought about the telephone in this way there is a good chance that you have discussed the way technological platforms like Facebook challenge your ownership of the electronic documentation of your private life, or how such platforms make previously private conversations public through newsfeeds, for instance. Indeed, exploring 'when old technologies were new' aids us in avoiding the pitfalls of anachronism and epochalism mentioned earlier. How so? Well, in seeing these technologies through the eyes of those confronting them for the first time, we can begin to put our own contemporary concerns into some sort of historical context. While the cases may seem very dissimilar, the tropes deployed by actors within the unfolding dramas might not appear quite as quaint as one might at first assume, nor the logics of justification, challenge and counter-challenge quite so alien to our own ways of thinking and debating. In so doing we might even be able to take some of the heat and drama out of contemporary debates, by indicating that not everything we confront is absolutely new and different, and that our forebears have, under different circumstances, been thinking about things and seeking to deal with them with the resources at their disposal in a way that can shed light on our own contemporary experiences.

When reading through this book, it will be evident to you that the Walkman also ignited public policy discussions and regulatory initiatives concerning the boundary between the public and the private. Despite being rather small-scale these debates and regulations tell important stories about the cultural practices connected to the Walkman. In one of the original readings in the book, 'Menace II society', the author discusses how his use of the Walkman in public space generated 'evil eyes' from people around him, and how public authorities acted to curb what was deemed excessive sound-levels on the device through the use of advertising campaigns and a related structure of fines for disturbing the peace. The discussions about the private and the public in relation to the Walkman were almost always framed in terms of private habits and passions being let loose in, indeed invading or undermining, public space and public values.

Looking at these discussions from the perspective of the present, the evil eyes argument in 'Menace II society' does now seem remarkably quaint. Even if debates about the appropriate use of mobile devices in public places has not entirely disappeared (the appearance of 'Quiet Zones' in trains, would be an example of this, for instance, as would the introduction of 'In flight' mode functions on mobile phones), there is rarely such a highly charged or moralizing dimension relating to the use of interactive, digital devices such as tablets in a public setting. The use of such devices is, to the contrary, frequently encouraged by public institutions, such as museums, that use QR codes to

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push information to their visitors. However, even though the specific discussions about the private and the public that accompanied the Walkman may be dated, we believe that the relational way of thinking expressed in the circuit of culture, and specifically the way of thinking about the role of material cultural artefacts in shifting the boundaries between the private and the public as something that sparks questions about regulation, is still extremely pertinent in the present. New mobile devices are clearly igniting questions about the boundary between the private and the public, and surfacing important matters of public concern and thus new regulatory impulses.

We have already mentioned the example of Facebook, and the discussions surrounding this platform are related to a more general debate about whether or not the digital traces we leave through our mobile devices entail a loss of privacy. The big question is whether there should be regulations concerning the way companies harness these traces and use them to target advertising at users. A recurring argument in this debate is that the users of such devices do not appreciate or understand the dangers posed to their own privacy. They simply do not know the consequences of their actions. Interestingly, this trope is not far removed from the way users of the Walkman were represented as failing to appreciate that they were in effect helping to create a world of ‘privatized’ individualism, undermining practices of publicness on which civil society depended. In other words, practices associated with modern Web-based mobile devices do have implications for the relations of public and private, and generate demands for regulation, and these implications are both similar to and also very different from those associated with earlier stand-alone mobile devices such as the Walkman. The iPhone, because of its connectivity, cannot be as easily categorized as representing something exclusively private, as the Walkman was so represented. If you are on Facebook on your tablet on a train, you are in a public space. Certain distinctions between private and public become blurry with new mobile devices and the platforms they allow you to access. Whereas the discussion of the Walkman focused on the threat of the private to the public, the discussion of modern devices relates to the public nature of the traces left by private users, and their use by private and public authorities, and thus their potential implications for people’s privacy.

The discussions about the public and the private and the extent to which regulation is needed to uphold the various, and often competing distinctions they express, is an example of the way the BFT boxes help identify the subtle relation of continuities and changes in cultural practices and technological developments through historical comparison and contextualization. But the aim of the boxes is broader than getting you to reflect on the ability of the circuit of culture to incorporate substantive technological developments. An equally crucial question is whether the theoretical focus on discourses, texts and other signifying practices that were central to the cultural turn are still the most apt concepts for explaining these substantive developments. Are the boundaries between the public and the private, for instance, settled because we agree on specific ways of drawing boundaries around these ‘spheres’, or are such settlements and stabilizations rather the result of socio-technical assemblages that include material actants in the way ANT suggests, for example? The BFT boxes encourage you to think about such theoretical questions as a supplement to reflecting on the circuit of culture from the perspective of substantive developments in mobile technology.

## 3.2 The interrelation of production, consumption and identity

The interrelation of production, consumption and identity has been at the centre of many analyses of the contemporary cultural industries, as well as other areas of cultural and media studies in recent years. Identity has often been tied to the acquisition of cultural codes through the consumption of specific goods. Brands like Apple, for instance, have specific cultural codes connected to their products and these codes can be traced back to specific forms of production. The production of Apple's design has for some time been thought of as rooted in cultural practices where designers have had the power to trump functional engineers. This is just one example of the way production chains, consumption patterns and identity-work can be connected in ways that establish cultural practices. If the connection is broken it will, however, have consequences for the practices established, and one example of a potential breakdown is the way discussion of Apple's production chain has begun to be reframed in terms of the way the company exploits workers in its Chinese production facilities. Such a change in the perception of production has implications for consumption and identity, and the rise of social media has increased not decreased their salience over the last 15 years.

The interrelation between production, consumption and identity was a prominent theme in the original Walkman book. All three concepts are explicit aspects of the circuit of culture and you will find that the text contains several examples of the way the production of the Walkman and the act of consuming it had mutual influence on each other. For example, Sony used a variety of feedback monitoring systems in calibrating the design of the selection of hardware cases to express a specific consumer identity. If you were a sporty person into running, doing weights etc., you would go for the Sports-Walkman. It came with accessories, so you could strap it to your arm when running, for instance, and was colourful and quite sturdy in appearance. The production chain was also part of the identity-work around the Walkman and when looking at these elements of production, consumption and identity from the perspective of today it is once again possible to track continuities and changes. One could point to changes such as the fact that hardware design is not the main way Apple customizes its mobile devices. The iPhone comes in one design, for example. But this is a detail that seems quite minor compared to the fact that the trends identified in the Walkman book concerning the mutual constitution of production, consumption and identity seems to have intensified in the intervening period. One example of these intensifying interrelations is the way user-generated content has become an integrated part of most modern mobile devices in one way or another. If you take a look at some of the top apps sold for iPhones and iPads you will get an idea of the extent to which users are involved in creating and maintaining the content that can be consumed through these devices. The Wikipedia app, for instance, gives you access to user-generated knowledge, the Yelp app provides you with customer ratings on bars and nightclubs, and there are thousands of other apps that are created by private users and sold through the Apple store. User involvement is, accordingly, happening at the level of software and it is also at this level

that you customize most modern mobile devices. Apple, to be sure, is the gatekeeper of this type of user-generated content but they are not the initiator. Its role in the production of the iPhone is therefore different than Sony's role in the production of the Walkman.

Once again this indicates that there are continuities and changes in relation to the way production, consumption and identity are entwined. The changing relations between these elements of the circuit of culture have continued to be a matter of theoretical and practical concern over the last decade. We believe the model is capable of handling these changes but it is once again an open question as to whether the conceptual languages of cultural studies need to be supplemented or refined in order to best explain them. Do we, for instance, need to stop thinking in terms of distinctions between the 'producer' and the 'consumer' in favour of talking about 'prosumers' or 'produsage'? Or are the continuities strong enough to legitimize sticking with the original concepts from the circuit? Going through the BFT boxes and the new readings will enable you to decide whether the need for such revisions in theoretical language make sense in relation to your specific studies.

### 3.3 Representation in a digital world

The concept of 'representation' was crucial to the original Walkman text. More than any other, perhaps, it helped to signal the distinctiveness of the approach being developed in the book, and indeed, throughout the series of books that accompanied the OU course *Culture, Media and Identities*. It was no accident, for instance, that the original Walkman text opens with the moment of 'representation'. This was a conscious choice by the team responsible for writing the book, because it sought to indicate that culture was everywhere, and that was previously taken to be 'purely' economic activity – such as the production of a mobile technological device by a large capitalist enterprise – was always, in addition, essentially cultural in character. Rather than privileging the moment of 'production' as the starting point of the analysis, the Walkman book seeks to indicate that all economically relevant activity is culturally constituted in important respects. If you think for a moment about that object we call an 'economy', or that which we refer to as 'an organization', it seems obvious that when we seek to manage these entities one of the first things we need to do is build a clear picture of what an economy or an organization looks like. We need to ask ourselves: what are its main components, and how do these relate to each other, and how do they stick together and 'work'? In other words, before we can seek to manage something called an economy or an organization, it is first necessary to conceptualize or represent a set of processes and relations as an economy or an organization which are amenable to management. We therefore need a discourse of the economy or the organization, and this discourse, like any other, will depend upon a particular mode of *representation*: the elaboration of a language and set of techniques for conceiving of and hence constructing that object in a certain way, so that object can be deliberated about and acted upon. Economic and organizational discourse here is not simply a matter of beliefs, values and symbols, but rather a form of representational and technological (i.e. cultural) practice that constitutes the spaces within which economic and organizational action is formatted and framed.

As you will shortly see, the original book continually refers to matters and questions of representation – at all of the moments of the circuit – to explain ‘the story’ of the Sony Walkman. This is why the analysis of the object is also an introduction to doing a cultural analysis – to doing ‘cultural studies’ as opposed to some other sort of analysis. Clearly, it is not the only way to approach the object in question, but a thoroughgoing attention to the cultural constitution of the Walkman at every moment of the circuit at least indicates what is at stake in approaching this device through the prism (or window on the world) of the cultural turn. One explicit example of the significance of ‘representational practice’ to the story of the Sony Walkman concerns the importance of branding, marketing and organizational culture (corporate culture) to the production and consumption of the Walkman as a material cultural artefact. For instance, the original text emphasizes the ways in which Sony worked with a distinctive marketing strategy, one elaborated through a particular understanding or discourse of management and organization, that aimed at standardizing their brand image while at the same time individualizing their product range. In its infancy, the Walkman was introduced under a plethora of different names and logos in different countries in order to carry specific representations that made sense in local markets. Sony, however, quite quickly saw the potential of assigning the generic name ‘Walkman’ to signify the portable cassette player as a certain sort of technology that people associated primarily, if not exclusively, with Sony. This form of global branding was a specific representational practice that Sony developed in combination with international warranty systems and standardized batteries. But at the same time, Sony also localized the Walkman by making specific designs that met local tastes. The company decentralized its operations in order to be able to respond to local conditions in their representational practices at the same time as developing the Walkman as a global brand. The double shuffle of simultaneous global and local representation was referred to as a strategy of ‘global-localization’.

The BTF boxes that address the theme of ‘representation in the digital age’ are designed to encourage you to juxtapose the sorts of representational practices associated with the development, production, and consumption of the Walkman with similar practices associated with contemporary digital and Web-based mobile devices. Branding arguably now plays an even more important role in the production of meaning attaching to modern mobile devices, but it is an open question as to whether the representational practices that were a crucial part of establishing the cultural significance of the Walkman are similar to or rather different from the representational practices deployed to create meaning for the iPod and other modern devices. Do the adverts and marketing materials – the visual representations – relating to the Walkman, for instance, convey different meanings of ‘global culture’ than the black silhouettes that were famously used to market the iPod? Does it make sense to talk about a ‘strategy of global-localization’ in 2013 or has the rise of the Internet made every representational strategy inevitably global? In thinking about such questions, you will have a chance to reflect on the extent to which the creation of meaning, representation and product attachment has changed and whether we need a new conceptual language to capture branding exercises today. The reading by Ana Andjelic, a brand consultant, for instance, questions the idea of branding campaigns as creating identification with products through representational techniques. Modern campaigns, she argues, are much more about steering activity around the product and the co-creation of meaning with the user.



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In her account, the Web is conceptualized as a behavioural platform rather than a medium for sending and receiving messages. Her theoretical vocabulary seems to share a set of family resemblances with the notions of produsage and practice introduced earlier.

As we have indicated already, the BTF boxes aim to assist you in reflecting on the extent to which you think such ‘new’ theoretical language is a useful development, aiding our explanations of contemporary cultural practices, or whether the concepts associated with the cultural turn still do a good job in explaining the way representational practices work in post-Internet branding exercises. By considering such questions we hope to stimulate you to consider the place of representation in the digital age, as it were. The rise of the Internet has led to the rise of novel signifiers such as hyperlinks, ‘likes’ on Facebook, connections on LinkedIn and tags on Flickr. One could question whether these new signifiers are best thought of as representational tools or whether they are better thought of as actants in a Latourian actor-network sense, where the locus of action is distributed and hard to pin down to specific moments of cultural ‘encoding’ and ‘decoding’. Is there even a difference between the actants that encode and the actants that decode in a range of modern cultural practices?

## 4 READING GUIDE

Having read through this introduction we hope you will be in good shape to benefit from the time-travelling structure of this revised version of the Walkman book. We have already indicated what we deem to be some of the potential learning outcomes of reading the revised text. The most central outcome is that you will learn to critically reflect on contemporary cultural practices through the means of historical comparison. Comparison is an important analytical skill that we believe will enable you to avoid some common pitfalls in cultural studies. By encouraging you to consider both continuities and changes between the artefact-based cultural practices of 1996 and 2013, the BTF boxes will hopefully make you reluctant to peddle easy claims about ‘revolutionary change’ or, indeed, about the world going to hell in a handcart. Engaging with the historically situated exercises will hopefully allow you to find your own, more empirically and conceptually subtle, way through such extreme positions, one that you will find of continual use in your studies. We encourage you to keep this focus on continuity and change at the forefront of your mind while engaging with both the original text and the BTF boxes.

Another outcome of this engagement, we hope, is that you will build up analytical competencies in relation to evaluating the heuristic usefulness of the circuit of culture in relation to doing cultural studies today. As we have indicated, the model consists of five (interrelated and cross-cutting) moments of regulation, production, consumption, identity-work and representation. Each of them, and indeed, their relation to one another, is made the subject of critical reflection through the use of the BTF boxes, and the main organizing themes introduced earlier – public/private and regulation, the interrelation of production, consumption and identity, and representation in a digital age. The BTF boxes will, however, not be structured according to these themes. There will be no

headline telling that you are now engaging with an exercise that belongs to the theme of regulation, for instance. The explication of these themes in the section above was mainly a way to prime you for the discussions that follow. When reading through the BTF boxes we therefore encourage you to think for yourselves about the issues raised and the matters of concern they relate to, and to refer these continually to the moments of the circuit, and the three themes introduced above, in seeking a plausible analysis of and answer to the questions posed.

Another key resource at your disposal is the selection of new readings that can be found at the back of the book. Some of the BTF boxes will ask you to read one of these texts as a means of engaging with the exercises in the box. The Selected Readings are excerpts of texts that we found useful in introducing a theoretical concept, an empirical development, or a shift in a specific practice. Like the readings in the original text, they are a mix of academic and popular materials. There are four more theoretically inclined texts. The first is Bruno Latour's piece 'Technology is society made durable' that introduces the central concepts of ANT. The second is Axel Bruns' piece 'Producers: towards a broader framework for user-led content creation' that questions the distinction between producers and consumers in a digital world. The third is Lev Manovich's piece 'There is only software' that argues strongly for an analytical focus on the production of software as the central site of modern cultural production. The fourth is Tim O'Reilly's piece 'What is Web 2.0?' that proposes to give a precise and distinctive definition to this highly charged but loosely deployed concept, and to chart its implications.

Besides these texts, there are also four other readings that focus more on substantive developments in mobile technology and their cultural effects. The first is Jonathan Zittrain's piece 'The personal computer is dead' that offers a broad argument about the consequences, personal and commercial, of the development away from PCs towards mobile devices such as the iPhone. In particular, the reading offers some useful pointers about Apple's role as part of the contemporary culture industry. The second is Ross Kaminsky's piece 'Iran's Twitter Revolution', which represents contemporary mobile devices as politically liberating. The third is 'Time to rewrite the brand playbook for the digital' by branding consultant, Ana Andjelic. She suggests that branding is an interactive and behavioural exercise rather than one framed by practices of representation and identification. The fourth piece is Mirko Tobias Schäfer's 'Bastard culture! How user participation transforms cultural production', which is not as celebratory as it sounds. It is rather a critique of what he calls the 'rhetoric of community' that surrounds the idea of Web 2.0 as it is promoted by O'Reilly. Schäfer's paper outlines three specific critiques of this rhetoric. One is that cultural production in the context of Web 2.0 is to a large extent built on people providing 'free labour' in the form of data and content that is subsequently capitalized on by big companies. The second is that this production involves important 'violations of privacy' and the third is that the quality of discussion of Web 2.0 platforms is influenced by the fact that the Web is an expansion of the private space. The community celebrated by proponents of Web 2.0 is, accordingly, not an unproblematic construction according to Schäfer.

Apart from the above, and some new images to accompany the BTF boxes and associated exercises, the main body of the text resembles the original 1996 original in its entirety. The original

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included a number of exercises and readings and we have not sought to change these, as we think they will prove useful to you. Every exercise that has a headline saying ‘Back to the Future’ is new and all the remaining exercises are from the 1996 edition. As we have just indicated, the revised edition also contains some new pictures and images to support some of the exercises in the BTF boxes. You will know that an image is new if it is referred to in a BTF box. Otherwise it is an image that also appeared in the 1996 edition. As we have said before, this constant travelling back and forth between 1996 and the present is central to the way the book is structured, and after having read this introduction you should be equipped to embark on the journey. We begin the trip by sending you back to the original introduction of 1996. Now!

Paul du Gay and Anders Koed Madsen  
Copenhagen, July, 2012