

Preface

This book is the result of “communicative enthusiasm,” to borrow an expression that Pierre Bourdieu used in a rare statement of professional exuberance to characterize the cohesive interaction within his research group. Except for two guests – Dennis Büscher-Ulbrich and Timo Müller – all contributors to this volume were at some point members of a long-standing study group. Its research program has focused on the methodological question addressed in the essays collected in the current volume, namely how to make use of the concepts of relational sociology, represented by Norbert Elias and Pierre Bourdieu, in the field of literary and cultural studies in general and in (African) American Studies in particular. The question emerged, as so often happens in our field, out of serendipitous reading – suggested, in this case, by my husband, Bernhard Buschendorf.

The “communicative enthusiasm” developed above all during the compact courses my husband and I would over many years jointly devise and teach, for instance, on “Key Concepts of Relational Thinking,” “Symbol Theories,” “Sociological Theories of Power,” or “Theories of Ideology.” Students, doctoral students, and young faculty members from the Department of Comparative Literature at Universität Duisburg-Essen and from the American Studies Department of Goethe-Universität Frankfurt would meet at Haus Bergkranz, a university-owned house located in the picturesque Alpine village of Riezlern, Kleinwalsertal. There we would enter into very intense and, as it were, never-ending discussions, hardly interrupted even when we took a break hiking in the mountains or when in the evening we would sit at the bar – “playing one of the most extraordinary games that one can play, that of research” (Bourdieu, *In Other Words* 26).

In grateful memory of the best of experiences academic life has to offer, I would like to thank all the participants of the seminars and reading groups who by entering the playfield and engaging in the exciting game of intellectual work have enlivened and enriched it.

Christa Buschendorf

