

Multiple Cultures – Multiple Perspectives

Questions of Identity and Urbanity in a Transnational Context. 3rd Annual Students Conference, May 15-17, 2003

Call For Papers

According to newer theories, the idea of culture can no longer refer to a homogeneous and harmonic state of being – instead these theories define cultures as necessarily hybrid, mixed and diasporic. The object and intention of these views is always the destabilization of concepts of dominance and the attempt to think not in terms of either/or but of multiplicity. In spite of, or maybe because of this multiplicity the concept of "Multiculturalism" has come under heavy scrutiny: does the "happy multicultural society" foreclose or obscure differences? Does it force assimilation instead of preserving minority cultures? Is multiculturalism inevitably an elitist idea?

But then again: Is there any other way than to become a multiculturalist? The turf remains heavily contested as postmodern societies try to strike a balance between necessary differences and the most common denominator.

With respect to the fact that multiple cultures can only be defined from multiple perspectives, the conference's title proposes to open up the necessary "spaces of contradiction". What are these spaces, where do we find them - where do cultures take place? As one of the prominent sites of cultural production, the urban space brings forth syntheses of cultures, mixtures and hybrids – it is the primary site of negotiation and also conflict. Furthermore, the multicultural coincides with the multimedial: Does the technological revolution of the information age work to eliminate differences wherever the necessary infrastructure exists, how can we grasp culture when cyberspace assumedly levels national borders? Do multiple cultures spread their influence via the internet, or does a new form of leveling take place, are there new concepts which appear in an environment outside the traditional borderlines?

Certainly, the question of the dominant and the marginal have to be addressed. Hegemonic patterns and lines of



discrimination continue to exist in multicultural societies – how can they be changed or overcome without foreclosing differences? In how far are marginal cultures forcibly "mainstreamed" and what are their strategies of resistance? How do minorities resist segregation and how do they affirm themselves? How does one discriminate between cultural self-affirmation and isolationism? And also, how does this relate to our task as students of trying to understand and analyze foreign cultures, or our own? Are multicultural societies comparable?

The new concepts and realities of culture – focusing on hybridity, the diaspora and the multiple - leave no room for easy antinomies like "it's them or us". Inevitably addressing the political, the conference will focus on questions like these and others, all relating to the interaction of multiple cultures and identities, and the perspectives arising therefrom. It will also take into account our very own and personal stance and position in a cultural framework which is getting increasingly intertwined, be it in the media, politics, academia or cyberspace.

Students of all faculties are invited to present original or seminar papers on the topic, join the discussions or just listen.

If you are interested in participating in the conference or would like to contribute a paper, please contact us and send us an abstract of your ideas as soon as possible. Although the language of the conference will be English, German papers are welcome as well. A current list of topics already covered, the preliminary program as well as further information can be found at the conference web site:

www2.hu-berlin.de/amerika/projects/multiplecultures

Organizers and Contact Information

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