Abstracts

Vered Amit: “Joint Commitment and Watchful Indifference: Coordination Challenges and Alternate Possibilities for Connection”

In previous work, I have argued that the persistence of ‘community’ both in scholarly and popular language, and the “strategic” ambiguities (Burke 1955) that are vested in its multiple uses can provide a useful framework for posing important questions about sociality. In this paper, I want to pick up on an argument that I broached in this earlier interrogation of community as a concept that is still “good to think with.” In that essay, I noted that a sense of belonging or connection was not automatically coterminous with the mobilisation of collectivity or ‘joint commitment’. In the paper that I will be presenting to the workshop on “Contesting and Constructing Community’, I want to further consider the potential divergence between collectivity and connection by exploring a form of encounter that may elicit a sense of belonging without drawing on a corresponding effort to mobilise or claim communal engagement. Specifically, I examine shared uses of public space that draw upon implicit stances of ‘watchful indifference’, a form of attentive co-presence that entails using and making space side-by-side rather than explicit collaboration.

Frank Hindricks: “The Social Practice Conception of Social Groups”

Social groups are legion. In this paper, I start from the premise that social groups are what social groups do or what is done to them. Such social groups owe their existence to social practices. The participants in a social practice engage in one or more activities. And they acknowledge or accept rules for action – schemas or scripts – that specify what to do when and possibly how to do it. Those who suitably acknowledge some such rule form a social group. And those who are systematically affected by it do so as well. This basic social practice concept of a social group can be developed so as to encompass a number of more specific conceptions. They range from mobs to identity groups, from marginalized groups to masses that are oppressed. Because it focuses on actions and their consequences, it is a suitable point of departure for analyzing discrimination, domination, exploitation, and oppression. But it can also be used to illuminate community building and identity politics. It also serves to shed light on social freedom and power, as well as collective rights and responsibilities. Thus, an insightful and powerful analysis of all these phenomena and, in particular, their interconnections starts from an adequate understanding of what social practices are.

Bruce Robbins: “Limits of the Anthropological Turn”

In a 2001 article entitled "Not Universalists, Not Pluralists: The New Cosmopolitans Find Their Own Way,” historian David Hollinger described what he called the "new cosmopolitanism" as a turn from a normative and singular understanding of cosmopolitanism to a descriptive and plural understanding. The first seemed best suited to philosophical treatment, while the second, which examined cosmopolitanism as an the actually existing phenomenon attached to particular communities, often non-elite diasporas, invited treatment by the social sciences, especially anthropology. One obvious question posed by this "anthropological turn" in cosmopolitan theory is: what becomes of the tension between cosmopolitanism and nationalism? A version of this question is: how much of the concept's honor-conferring normative dimension remains
once it is re-located to historically specific collectivities? My last two books, Perpetual War (2012) and The Beneficiary (2017) have addressed these questions. Here I would like to pursue them further by discussing the possibility of a cosmopolitan literary history organized around collective violence.

James Barber: “Negotiating nationalism(s): The construction of ‘traditional narratives’ and their impact on transcultural readings of reggae and hip-hop, 1970 to 1995”

In the case of the “second mass migration” of working-class Jamaicans to the US (1960-1990), several theorists note that Jamaican cultural symbols in general took “some time to percolate through African-/American urban cultural practice” and hip-hop (Patterson, 1994; Marshall, 2006; 215), with Rastafari symbols arriving even later (Jacob, 1993).

The impact of Jamaican cultural signifiers on US ‘East Coast’ hip-hop, in particular that of New York, occupy a contradictory position: despite the Jamaican heritage of hip-hop’s founding father Kool Herc, its influence has consistently been both acknowledged and denied (Marshall 2006; O’Brien Chang & Chen 1998). In addition, many of the first “explicit” examples of Jamaican signifiers in US hip-hop, beginning in 1987, were ‘adopted’ by African-American, not Jamaican, hip-hop artists (Marshall, 2006, 212).

This paper posits the argument that greater attention should be paid to the role of “traditional narratives”, that is ideological discourses rooted in the nationalisms of both reggae and hip-hop, which somewhat in contrast to Marshall (2006) I suppose are central to understanding the reproduction and delayed reception of signifiers of the Jamaican diasporic community in New York hip-hop.

Martina Eberle: “Ephemeral Communities and Temporary Identities: Configurations of a Workforce in a Site of Contemporary Capitalist Production”

In today’s multi-national companies employees are configured as groups of individuals who share some common identity. I argue, that this specific form of identity is grounded in present social states – contrasting with concepts of identity based on historic social events. In the acts in which employees are recognized as producers of sentiment (Illouz 2007) who contribute to the construction of a temporary social space individuals are placed in a space of control and enclosed as assets of capitalist production. Analyzing the digital representations with which communities of employees are constructed, monitored and controlled this paper explores the agency of algocratic regimes (Aneesh 2006) which adhere to principles of transparency and presentism (Hartog 2003). This paper raises the question what the concepts of community and identity represent in sites of contemporary capitalist production.
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Birgit Schmölz: “Political Communities under the Prevailing Pressure of the Transnational Cleavage”

Deep-rooted rifts and the emergence of a so-called cosmopolitan or transnational cleavage strongly affects political communities all over Europe. This phenomenon simultaneously entails an immense conflict potential, with right-wing parties and illiberalism steadily rising. The scientific analysis of the process of all-encompassing political, economic and societal shifts in our communities and societies has yet to be completed (Beck/Grande 2010; Góra/Mach 2010; Rensmann et al. 2017). Within the realm of the transnational cleavage model – where the two poles of cosmopolitanism and nationalism are immanent – researchers should have a closer look on the construction of a political community (Held 1999; Held 2006). Therefore, it is essential to investigate the positioning and structure of identity groups that cluster along the poles of cosmopolitanism and nationalism (Spears 2011; Tajfel/Turner 1979). The major assumption will be that social identity groups constitute a political community with the latter as the greater good and the social identity groups as its differentiated subcategory. Rifts in communities can be described as a conflict of two different social identity groups that collide and destabilize the functioning of a political community. Does this conflicting issue demonstrate a lack of political representation as democratic parties have neglected certain social identity groups and their aspiration for recognition (Bornschier 2018, Fukuyama 2018)? Furthermore, how can the “failures of representation” (Frieden 2017) be deconstructed? In order to answer these questions, it is important to discover how politics can ease the pressure of globalization engendering a tensed political community.

Erika Brantschen Berclaz: “Fernando Pessoa (1888-1935) and ‘Coterieness’: Envisioning Artistic Collectivities at Times of War”

The Modernist author Fernando Pessoa wrote in Portuguese, English and French under 136 different aliases – the so-called “heteronyms”. According to Pessoa, the heteronyms were supposed to be “[...] entities with their own simili life, feelings which are not my own, opinions I do not accept. Their writings are foreign works, although, by chance, they are mine.” (ca. December 1928). During the Great War, these and other literary individualities were (re)organized in different collectivities or “coteries”: anthologies, libraries, literary magazines, avantgardistic movements and other cultural projects. Imaginary or real, contemporary or not, several authors could, for a limited period of time, cross linguistic and cultural barriers and share a highly symbolic space, be it the page of a magazine or a bookshelf. “Coterieness” would become, according to Pessoa's reasoning, the distinctive feature of a Modernist Art yet to come: Fernando Pessoa's “coteries” can be seen as forms of "metonymic communities" (cf. Claviez 2016).