Theory and Practice of Authenticity in Global Cultural Production

Subproject A: A Post-Authentic Society? Toward a Metonymic Poetics of Community

Most traditional understandings of what constitutes a community are grounded in the notion of an “authentic” culture and identity shared by members welcomed into a particular communal circle. Such an application of authenticity goes hand in hand with a “metaphoric” conception of community which presupposes that members of a community share a third – i.e. things like values, world views, traditions, histories, and, most often, language – which asserts the alleged likeliness and linkedness between community members. However, such a metaphoric conceptualization has become increasingly problematic. Globalization and its effects – such as increased migration, mobility, and diaspora – have undermined fixed, local communities and made porous the borders not only of the national state, but also of the conceptual line between society and community. Some of the more recent contributions to philosophy and social theory have reacted to these developments by trying to define what could be called a ‘post-identitarian’ community. They mostly revolve around the idea of contingency and present communities that are a result of pure spatial contiguity brought about by a highly mobile and glocalized world. Subproject A approaches the need for a reconceptualization of contemporary communities both by discussing recent theoretical contributions and an examination of European and North-American (post-)modernist literary fiction. Drawing from theorizations by philosophers such as Maurice Blanchot, Jean-Luc Nancy, Giorgio Agamben, the subproject attempts to think of “post-identitarian” societies through the lens provided by the notion of “metonymy.” Likewise considering recent contributions to postcolonial (e.g. Homi Bhabha, Gayatri Spivak) and feminist studies (e.g. Hélène Cixous, Luce Irigaray, Donna Haraway), which try to transcend notions of authenticity and promote concepts such as “hybridity,” “mimicry,” “splitness,” “processuality,” and “mixture,” the subproject makes use of “metonymy” as an alternative trope through which contemporary, constantly shifting communities can be best perceived. DOCTORAL RESEARCH PROJECT I (Ryan Kopaitich) examines how philosophy, specifically theories of language and ontology, serve as the groundwork for a dialectic of community that each individual must negotiate in a post-identitarian society. These theoretical ruminations are accompanied by readings of European and US-American postmodernist literary fiction. DOCTORAL RESEARCH PROJECT II (Viola Marchi) offers an innovative discussion of novel poetics of community anticipated in recent philosophical as well as literary works.

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