

Call for Papers

Shifting German Landscapes: East-West Perspectives on Cultural Hybridity and Place

An international, interdisciplinary conference
at the Institute of Germanic and Romance Studies, University of London

Thursday, 8 – Friday, 9 November 2012

In Germany as elsewhere in Europe, multiculturalism has sparked heated and politically charged debates over the past decades. Even though mass migration and social transformations throughout Europe since 1989 have destabilized binaries such as East and West, Orient and Occident, or centre and margin, debates about identity and belonging have continued to construct notions of sameness and difference along geographical, cultural and mental maps that reinscribe such binaries. Whilst the figure of the migrant from the East has been prominent in German culture and society, moreover, little attention has been given since 1989 to the experiences of Germans as migrants in the East. Given that questions of ethnicity, migration and citizenship have been posed in West and East Europe in very different ways and with very different socio-political and cultural consequences (Brubakers 2004), a closer investigation of cultural hybridity in relation to place appears timely. Taking migrants from the East who now live and work in Germany and, conversely, people of German descent who have moved to the East as a focus of investigation, this conference seeks to explore hybrid identities in the context of shifting geographies in Europe since 1989 from an interdisciplinary perspective. This will involve the study of articulations, enunciations, representations, and self-representations of minority identities in relation to specific places and geographies as well as their political configuration and framing. The conference will ask to what extent notions of West and East, or centre and margin, have been destabilized since 1989 and explore identity constructions in relation to territory, borders, and communities of belonging. It will investigate the social and cultural construction of notions of difference and sameness and explore the tensions that are created as a result of such constructions. What does it mean to 'become foreign' or to be cast as the 'stranger' in the West / in the East? How are minority statuses transmitted; how can minorities become majorities and vice versa? How can individual locations of belonging become group locations of belonging? Can minority status be liberating as well as burdensome? How and why do cultural and mental maps change as a result of migration from East to West / West to East and how and why are some maps privileged over others? How are questions of minority, migration, and difference posed in West and East, what are the political and socio-cultural implications and consequences of such differences? Can notions of hybridity pose a viable alternative to configurations of difference and sameness in multicultural or transnational frames? In addressing questions such as these the conference hopes to foster better understanding of the nature in which mental and cultural maps have changed or persisted within politically shifting landscapes over the past decades.

Core themes and questions to be explored include, but are not restricted to:

- Shifting perspectives of margin and centre as a result of migration westwards or eastwards
- Cultural encounters and shifting landscapes
- Hybrid identity constructions in relation to place and territory
- The framing of sameness and difference
- The destabilization or stabilization of political and cultural geographies
- Multiculturalism, ethnicity, and identity politics
- Cartographies of belonging
- Bordercrossing and the making and unmaking of place
- The transmission of minority status (minorities into majorities and vice versa)
- The transmission of individual to group locations
- Issues of sameness and difference, the construction of self and other, the figure of the stranger
- Memory and cultural hybridity
- The configuration of cultural difference in German culture and their political and socio-cultural consequences
- Mapping minority groups in Germany: who and where are Germany's minorities?
- Minority rights in Germany; rights of Germans as minorities
- Germans and their 'others' and Germans as 'the other'
- Narrative and critical strategies in representations and self-representations of minorities in Germany or of Germans as minorities
- The mediatization of multiculturalism in Germany: representations in the press and TV

Keynote speakers:

Deniz Göktürk, University of California, Berkeley

Tove H. Malloy, Director, European Centre for Minority Issues, Flensburg

Abstracts (250-300 words max.) should be sent by 31 January 2012 to Renate Rechten (R.A.Rechten@bath.ac.uk) for proposals on aspects relating to culture, literature and film, and to David Galbreath (D.Galbreath@bath.ac.uk) for proposals relating to Political Studies, Sociology and International Relations.

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